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## **The charro cantor : a mediation between rural and urban culture**

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**THE *CHARRO CANTOR*:  
A MEDIATION BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN CULTURE**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in Spanish American Studies by  
Talía Magdalena Luna de Morris**

**King's College London  
University of London  
2004**

**THESIS  
CONTAINS  
CD/DVD**

## ABSTRACT

This study is a cultural history of the *charro cantor* who appeared with the development of the mass media in Mexico: the “talkies” and the radio in the 1930s. The emergence of the films known as the *comedias rancheras*, the use of rural images such as the *charro* and of songs in these films renders them appropriate to study within the context of the relations between mass media and popular culture. Three main questions will be addressed: 1) To what extent was the *charro cantor* a creation of the media? 2) At the time when these films were first shown, what was the relationship between the media and the government? 3) How do we account for the popularity of these artists in their day? In this work the term mediations is used as a conceptual framework for the study of the media and popular culture in Mexico as forming part of a process of cultural evolution. Thus, the *charro cantor* and the *canciones rancheras* are examined within the concept that mass culture did not appear suddenly and in confrontation with old popular expressions, but was part of the process of the massification in society which had started in the nineteenth century.

This work traces various elements of melodrama in the *comedia ranchera*, especially the image of the *charro*, back to previous popular forms. The Introduction sets out the framework of study and offers a brief discussion of the literature concerning the *charro cantor* and a descriptive account of the elements which constitute the *charro cantor* and his music, the *canción ranchera*. Chapters 1 and 2 look at the *charro* in his role of bandit in the nineteenth and early twentieth century serials and *corridos*. Chapter 3 studies the development of the *charro* in popular theatre and the entrance of the *mariachi* band in the radio industry from 1930 to 1952. Chapter 4 concentrates on the development of the cinema from the time of the post-revolutionary governments of the 1920s, to its expansion in the 1940s into a partnership between the state and the private sector. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 analyse three key films between 1930 and 1952, in order to look closely at the development of the *charro cantor* in the *comedias rancheras* films



and the way songs were used in these films. These chapters permit the study of the *ranchero* repertoire within the context of the films. This sheds light on how in the Mexican cinema songs were used in specific realistic settings such as the *palenques* (cockfight rings), *cantinas* and *pulquerías*; the serenade and the family party. This facilitates the analysis of the song narratives within the context in which they were presented to the audience and examines the types of songs included in the *ranchero* repertoire: *corridos* and serenades both old and new, *canciones mexicanas* from popular theatre, and *canciones rancheras*, the songs specially written for these films. The Appendix includes the biographies of two of the main representatives of the *Charro Cantor*, the stars Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante.

This dissertation contributes to the field of cultural studies by the application of the concept of mediations which allows for the study of popular culture and mass media as part of a process of development, avoiding the division between high and low culture. This also permits an examination of the changes in the relationships between the media, the audience and the government. This approach makes it possible to bring together the various pre-electronic elements of the *charro cantor* such as the characteristics of melodrama in the narratives of the nineteenth century *folletines* and *novelas por entrega*. These forms together with popular theatre and *corridos* are studied with reference to their influence upon the emergence of the *charro cantor* image in radio and cinema. This will explain how the *charro cantor* was for the audience, many of them rural immigrants, a mediation, a vehicle for their transition from their rural culture to life in the city.

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A selection of the songs examined has been included in a CD which accompanies this thesis. This is only for research and should not be detached from this thesis and played or reproduced for any other purpose.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. General Overview

In 1936 a film appeared on Mexican screens which was to prove a turning point for Mexican cinema and establish an image of Mexico which would be recognizable throughout the world. It was called *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and its director was Fernando de Fuentes. It was to lead to the use of a new term, *charro cantor*, in the vocabulary of reception. The film was a national and international box-office success and began the trend of films we now call *comedias rancheras*. It was also to make a star of the Mexican actor and singer, Tito Guizar. This image was consolidated with the appearance of the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* (dir. Joselito Rodríguez, 1941), with Jorge Negrete who was referred to by the media as *El charro cantor*. The film industry later found his "rival" in the actor Pedro Infante. In due course, the repertoire of the *charro cantor*, the *canciones rancheras*, became included in the study of popular music.

This thesis seeks to study the history of the *charro cantor* and the *canción ranchera*, in the context of Mexican film and national identity. For the purpose of this study and as a frame of reference for my study of the origins of the *charro cantor*, it is necessary to consider the relationship between the media and popular culture. Critics such as Jean Franco, Jesús Martín Barbero, Carlos Monsiváis, William Rowe and Vivian Shelling provide approaches to this problem which will be taken up later in this study. Jean Franco points out that the term *cultura popular* in Latin America raises complex issues due to its different meanings: "it covers all that is not institutionalized as 'high culture'; it also involves other terms such as 'mass culture', 'folk culture', 'entertainment', 'media', 'communications', or 'culture industry' "<sup>1</sup>. Martín Barbero agrees with Franco that in the critical literature of the area of communication in Latin America, there have been different interpretations of the term popular culture: it is sometimes identified with the masses; or *cultura popular* is the "absence of culture"; it represents class struggle or is an expression of the primitive.<sup>2</sup> Monsiváis does not accept the view widely held

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Franco, 'What's in a name? Popular Culture Theories and their Limitations', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture (SLAPC)*, 2 (1982), 5-14 (p. 5).

<sup>2</sup>Jesús Martín Barbero, *Communications, Culture and Hegemony* (London: Sage, 1993). Martín Barbero examines the polarization of studies in communication in Latin America during the development of media studies in the 1960s and 1970s. He questions the various theoretical approaches which identify *cultura popular* with the masses, or the idea that popular culture is the "absence of culture", that it represents class struggle or is an expression of the primitive. Among other works, he analyses the impact of the work of Ariel Dorfman and A. Mattelard in their book *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* for whom the economically dominant nation exploits the weaker nations. He reassesses the influence of the "Frankfurt School" and revises Adorno's division of high and low culture and his interpretation of the manipulation of the passive masses. He also examines the influence of semiotics in the work of Umberto Eco, *Apocalípticos e integrados ante la cultura de masas*. He disagrees with the view of mass culture as "anticulture". He proposes instead to look at the reality in Latin America, in which popular culture and the media co-exist together.



in Mexico that popular culture is the culture of the people. He points out that understood in this way the term *cultura popular* “inscribes itself in a political language” and “the term ends up capriciously unifying ethnic, regional and class differences.”<sup>3</sup>

Martín Barbero provides a starting point for study by stating that the relationship between popular culture and the media did not involve a sudden shift from popular culture to mass culture with the development of the technologies of the cinema and the radio: “Mass culture did not appear suddenly out of the blue and in sharp confrontation with the old popular culture.”<sup>4</sup> He proposes that instead of just concentrating on the study of mass culture and the messages communicated to the masses, it is necessary to study the history of the development of culture, this understood in the broader sense: “se trata de comprender que la historia que necesitamos no es sólo una historia de los medios...lo que necesitamos es una historia de la constitución de lo cultural que nos permita pensar esta continuidad”.<sup>5</sup> He adds that “cultural processes associated with the emergence of the masses cannot be explained unless they are seen to be closely linked with the new forms of hegemony that from the nineteenth century make culture a strategic space for the reconciliation of the classes and re-absorption of social differences.”<sup>6</sup> Rowe and Schelling agree with Martín Barbero that Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is useful to the study of the media because it permits the view that there is consent, resistance and transformation “in that it highlights the negotiations which take place on a cultural level between dominant and subaltern groups”.<sup>7</sup> This makes it possible to understand culture as inseparable from relationships of power.<sup>8</sup>

For Martín Barbero the nation is a field of rich contradictions and he uses the term ‘mediations’ as a theoretical tool to examine the relationship between the media and popular culture. He proposes the study not of the Media (i.e. of the technology) itself on its own, but of the mediations: “No desde los medios sino desde las mediaciones, desde las articulaciones entre prácticas de comunicación y movimientos sociales, y las diferentes temporalidades.”<sup>9</sup> For Martín Barbero in the formation of cultural identities, the relationships between the dominant and subaltern groups change from one period of time to another, and there is both resistance and seduction in the area of reception. Thus, Rowe and Schelling agree with Martín Barbero that the media: “are not mere conveyors

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 165.

<sup>4</sup>Martín Barbero, *Communications*, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup>Jesús Martín Barbero, *Procesos de comunicación y matrices de cultura: itinerario para salir de la razón dualista* (Cali: Felafacs, 1987), p. 203.

<sup>6</sup>Martín Barbero, *Communications*, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup>Rowe, p. 165.

<sup>8</sup>Idem

<sup>9</sup>Martín Barbero, *Procesos*, p. 153.



of messages but ‘meeting-points’ of often contradictory ways of remembering and interpreting.”<sup>10</sup>

Following the theoretical framework provided by Franco, Martín Barbero, Monsiváis, Rowe and Schelling the term mediation, in this study, will be used to indicate a vehicle to facilitate change. This term will be used to explain the relationships between popular culture and the media, the government and the media, and the cinema and its audience; these relationships will be considered in the light of the changes in the process of development of the mass media, which will facilitate an understanding of the co-existence of popular and mass culture. This approach will permit original research into the study of the construction of the image of the *charro cantor*. An interdisciplinary approach will make it possible to investigate the elements of melodrama in the image of the *charro cantor* and the *comedias rancheras* which on the level of narrative can be traced back to nineteenth century *folletines* and *novelas por entrega*, popular theatre and *corridos*. This approach will also facilitate an examination of the link between the *charro cantor* and the *mariachi*, an area of study which has so far been neglected.

The image of the *charro cantor* will be examined as an evolving figure, a product from the rural memory of people becoming urbanized in the process of the development of mass culture: “a form of recovery of popular memory through the cultural images produced by the culture industry and a metaphor indicating the different presence of the people in the masses”.<sup>11</sup> This will facilitate the understanding of how the *charro cantor* was a mediation for the audience, many of whom had recently made the transition from life in a rural community to a new existence in Mexico City. The study of the songs within the context of the films will illustrate the process of audience identification, providing an example of the co-existence of popular and mass culture.

Three questions will guide this study: 1) To what extent was the *charro cantor* a creation of the media? 2) At the times when these films were first shown, what was the relationship between the media and the governments? 3) How do we account for the popularity of Tito Guizar, Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante in their day?

In order to provide a model of the constituent elements of the *charro cantor*, I will offer the following description. The name *charro cantor* is a term coined by the media specifically for the baritone Jorge Negrete after the success of his film *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* (1941), but it is applied in retrospect to other singers who appeared in musical films set in the countryside, for example Tito Guizar, star of the first *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936), and later to Pedro Infante in certain roles such as in *Dos Tipos de*

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<sup>10</sup>Rowe, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 228.



*Cuidado* (1952). Although it appeared with the development of the “new” mass media - the radio and the cinema - and was strongly linked to the singing stars Guizar, Negrete and Infante, the image of the *charro cantor* contains various elements which can be found in pre-electronic popular forms. The intention of this study is then to undertake a study of the *charro cantor*, tracing its roots back to the popular culture of the nineteenth and twentieth century in order to understand its development in the mass media from the period of the 1930s to 1952.

The image of the *charro* with his sparkling costume and big *sombrero* can be traced back to the nineteenth century narratives of the *folletines* and *novelas por entrega*. In these narratives, the *charro* is on the fringes of the law in a society in which civil institutions are weak. The wealth expressed in his clothes, the *charro* costume, and his horse makes an important visual impact which is needed in order to impose his authority in a rural society. These narratives contain elements of melodrama; this, as Monsiváis and Martín Barbero point out, provides a link between traditional popular culture and the products of the mass media with its essential characteristics of time, recognition and morality which can be detected in the films. The cinematic *charro cantor* also absorbed certain characteristics from the *corridos*, particularly from the *valientes* with their sometimes self-mocking braggadocio. There are also influences from the popular theatre in which the *charro* was often the central character; with the development of the *revistas*, singing was an essential part of his role. Some of these songs passed into the repertoire of the cinematic *charro*, for example the well known *Ojos Tapatíos*.

According to Monsiváis, there are two main periods in the development of the *charro cantor* in the media.<sup>12</sup> The first period coincides with the rapid development of the film and radio industries from 1930 to 1952 in which both industries were learning and experimenting. The second period is from 1952 to the present. I have chosen to end my research in 1952 for various reasons: in that year the two main *charros cantores* of the time Negrete and Infante worked for the first and last time together. After this period the *cantante ranchero/a* was part of a more highly organized media industry which had the competition of the “new medium”, television.

In this study I will examine the changes in the image of the *charro cantor* from the softer image presented by Tito Guizar to the more forceful, proud *macho* of Jorge Negrete and later to the happy-go-lucky Pedro Infante. The films display certain characteristics which make them recognizable as a separate genre called *comedias rancheras*, in which the repertoire of the *charro cantor* was soon to be known as *canciones rancheras*. These songs occur in settings which appear to be “real” situations, a tradition derived from *revistas* and *tandas* of the popular theatre. For

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<sup>12</sup>Carlos Monsiváis, personal interview 30th March 1996. Mexico City.



example, the songs are set in the *palenques* (cockfight rings), as serenades, and in places of popular entertainment such as the *cantina*, *pulquerías* and at family parties.

*Canción ranchera* is a term which has become attached to a diverse collection of songs associated with the *charro cantor*. They can be roughly divided chronologically into two groups: those which appeared before 1950 and those which came after. An examination of the repertoire of the *charro cantor* in the 1930s and 1940s will reveal that his songs were taken from various sources: there were old *corridos* taken from the time of the Revolution (1910-1920), and also new ones specially written for the radio or cinema. Of the *corridos* of the Revolution, the most famous are *La Adelita* and *La Valentina*. The popular *Allá en el Rancho Grande* was a new *corrido*, it was originally thought to be traditional but was later discovered to have been written by Silvano Ramos. There were old songs from the popular theatre such as *serenatas* and there were new songs specially composed for the films. The repertoire also included old songs known as *canciones mexicanas*.

*Canción mexicana*, advises Monsiváis, is a term to be used with caution because it does not mean just any Mexican song. They were a specific, separate genre which originated in the *carpas* (marquees in the poor *barrios* of Mexico City).<sup>13</sup> Monsiváis explains that songs of this type touch themes specifically related to the *ranchito*. The conventions of the styles of singing were also distinctive; they were sung in the quasi-operatic style of the time, a characteristic of much popular music not only in Mexico but in Europe and the US. In Mexico one of these influences comes from the *zarzuela*. A notable example is *La Borrachita*, with the words: “borrachita me voy hasta la capital/pa’ servir al patrón que me mandó llamar *antiayer*”.<sup>14</sup> Examples included in the *ranchera* repertoire are *Alevántate* (recorded by Pedro Infante), *Rayando el Sol* and *Adios mi Chaparrita* (recorded by Jorge Negrete).

The three main male exponents of the *canciones rancheras* during the period between the 1930s and 1952 had their distinctive vocal styles. Tito Guizar was a fine lyric tenor, and the baritone Jorge Negrete had had an operatic training; Pedro Infante however was a microphone singer. Tito Guizar became well known after the success of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* but unlike Negrete and Infante, Guizar did not have songs specially written for him. On the other hand, composers like Manuel Esperón began to write songs suitable for Negrete and Infante’s very different voices. Once Negrete had become established as the *charro cantor*, many of his 1940s songs were written by Esperón and the lyricist Ernesto Cortázar. Their themes during this period are often described as *machismo*, *chovinismo* and *nacionalismo*. Examples which will be analysed

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<sup>13</sup>Idem

<sup>14</sup>Recorded by the Spanish tenor Miguel Fleta in 1928.



in detail later in the thesis are: *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* (Chapter 6), *El Gallero* (Chapter 5) and *Fiesta Mexicana* (Chapter 7). The main female *ranchero* singer during the 1930s and early 1940s was Lucha Reyes. Monsiváis points out that it was Reyes who introduced the “estilo bravío” which established the basis for one of the styles of singing of the female *ranchero* singers. This style involved the use of the female chest register with aggressive, dramatic projection which Reyes took from the *cantadoras*, the travelling singers who performed in the *palenques* (cockfight arenas). Reyes’ career in the media was short and had begun to decline by the early 1940s, the period of the re-emergence of the *comedias rancheras*; thus I have chosen to analyse her performance in the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* just as an example of her style of singing.

Infante’s voice did not have the force of Negrete’s, but it had a more caressing quality. Thus, many of the songs composed for him are specifically suited to his voice: these include serenades, various styles of *corridos*, *boleros*, and what are called *boleros rancheros*. For Infante’s film *Nosotros los Pobres* (1947), Esperón wrote the *bolero*, *Amorcito Corazón*. In a later recording of this song, Infante was accompanied by *mariachis*. This marked the beginning of a new genre, the *bolero ranchero* (sentimental songs of love, but accompanied by a *mariachi* band and having a slightly faster rhythm than the traditional *bolero*). However, that is outside the parameters of this study. Infante also included in his *ranchero* repertoire a group of comic songs by the composer Salvador “Chava” Flores which convey a rural atmosphere in the accompaniment but whose lyrics deal with life in the City. An example is *La Tertulia* which featured in the film *Dos Tipos de Cuidado*, and will be analysed in Chapter 7.

A significant characteristic of the *charro cantor* is his link with the *mariachis*. The cinematic image is of a *charro cantor* accompanied by a group of *mariachis* all dressed in *charro* costumes. This connection between the *charro cantor* and the *mariachis* began in the cinema. The transformation of the *mariachis* from a rural band from Jalisco, dressed in their simple white cotton garments and playing their traditional regional music into a group wearing *charro* costumes had begun in the 1920s with their arrival in Mexico City and their performances in popular theatre. They wore these costumes even when they appeared before a studio audience for live broadcasts on the radio as the backing for *ranchero* singers. When sound films began to develop in the 1930s, the *mariachis* were the ideal accompaniment to the *charro cantor*. The original *mariachi* line-up was the guitar, *tololoche*, harp and violin. By the late 1940s more guitars were added and the *mariachis* began to include the trumpet, soaring above the other instruments. Thus the different type of songs in the repertoire of the *charro cantor* accompanied by the *mariachis* began to be recognized as *canciones rancheras*. After the 1950s, the media sought to target specific audiences and the *canciones rancheras* became a song genre in their own right and composers such as José Alfredo Jiménez,



Tomás Méndez and Rubén Fuentes, abandoned the themes of nationalism to concentrate on more intimate emotions. The style of singing also changed: the style of the ‘galloping horse’, and the ‘open air’ atmosphere which characterizes such songs as *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* gave way to the melancholy of the city dweller in songs like *Ella*. This period has interesting possibilities for further study but it is beyond the scope of the present research.

## 2. Critical Context

The following is a review of the material from which I have drawn to undertake this study. For the purpose of clarity I have divided it into four areas: basic material, background material, original material, and field work (interviews and archival research).

The following critics have contributed to my basic thesis. In her work *El charro: la construcción de un estereotipo nacional: 1920-1940*, Tania Carreño King studies the construction of the *charro* as a stereotype between those years. Her main theme is the study of this figure in the process of reconstruction of the new Mexican State during the post-revolution era which was dominated by nationalism. She states that this nationalism produced various symbols and myths to re-invent “lo mexicano”. Carreño King relates how she discovered in the cinema the most complete representation of the stereotype of Mexican nationalism. For her, the *charro* is an anachronistic figure because it reminds her of the rich *hacendado* of the Porfiriato, the colonial period, the aristocracy and the literature of the nineteenth century.

She poses the question of why the *charro* - an image identified with the rural aristocracy, linked to a conservative tradition - was chosen to represent *lo mexicano* after the post-revolutionary period. Her answer is that this was due to various factors: for example, the influence of various conservative groups in the film industry who turned to tradition to affirm their nationalism and to voice their opposition to the post-revolutionary regimes without going beyond the law. She adds that the post-revolutionary governments needed above all to unite the country, and turned to the *charro* as a means of appeasing the region of Jalisco, which had experienced the consequences of the conflict of *La Cristiada* and *La Reforma Agraria*. A further factor for her was the nostalgia experienced by the newcomers to the city. Carreño King examines the use which the post-revolutionary governments of this period made of the *charro*, for example in public celebrations, and the way that various films presented this image. She concludes that this stereotype was created by an alliance between the government and the conservative landowners who colluded with the media in its promotion.



My approach differs from hers, in that by tracing the characteristics of the *charro* back to the nineteenth century makes it possible to see that the elements of popular culture in these films relate to the image not of the *hacendado* but to a man on the fringes of the law, often a bandit or highwayman. This is important in this study because some of the characteristics of the image of the *charro cantor* were already present in the popular culture of the serials, popular theatre and *corridos*. Thus the audience could identify with this figure from folk memory. With regards to the nationalism of the post-revolutionary governments, my approach is different from Carreño King's. I agree with her assertion that the government took the *charro* and other images from popular culture as part of the creation of nationalism in order to unify the country, but I disagree with her contention that the government imposed the image of the *charro* on "el pueblo". I propose that the relationship between the government and "el pueblo" changed continually and there was involvement rather than imposition on the part of the government. I add to her approach a study of the nineteenth century serials in order to examine how various elements of the melodrama in these narratives passed later on into the films. I also analyse the songs within the context of the films in order to observe the workings of popular culture and the media.

The work of the critic Jorge Ayala Blanco in *La aventura del cine mexicano* has also contributed to my basic approach. In Ayala Blanco's analysis of the Mexican cinema, he distinguishes between melodramas (by which he means sentimental films of family life with tragic endings) and *comedias rancheras*. In his analysis of the *comedias rancheras*, he points out that these have influences from a variety of sources: the silent cinema, the Spanish *zarzuelas*, popular theatre, folklore and *artesanías*. He briefly studies the image of the *charro* and says that in his opinion these films were also influenced by what he calls American Musical Westerns. In his account he divides the *comedias rancheras* into two groups: the *comedia ranchera ingenua*, with films such as *Los tres García*; and the *comedia ranchera socarrona*, with films such as *Dos Tipos de Cuidado*. His study of the latter film has enabled me to understand the development at the time of what he calls *cinema de actor* in which the producer Ismael Rodríguez was careful to give equal status to two of the biggest stars of the time, Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante. Ayala Blanco's analysis has proved useful in terms of the understanding and further examination of the different influences on the *comedias rancheras*. In my own analysis my understanding of the term melodrama is broader, and as previously stated follows Monsiváis and Martín Barbero. I interpret melodrama as a narrative form which appeals directly to the emotions and its characteristics can be traced in nineteenth century serials, popular theatre and the *corridos* which influenced the *comedias rancheras*.

I also engage in an analysis of the songs within the context of the films. John King's *Magical Reels* and his article 'Cinema' enabled me to place the emergence of the *charro*



*cantor* and the *comedias rancheras* within the context of the development of the Mexican film industry. He offers a concise account of the development of the Mexican cinema in the period of the emergence of the *comedias rancheras*, 1930s and 1940s. King sums up the various factors which encouraged the development of the Mexican film industry, stressing the importance of the actors and film makers who had worked in Hollywood. King also draws attention to the vitality of the director Fernando de Fuentes whose films about the Revolution of 1910 are a landmark in Mexican cinema and who went on to direct *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936), which is considered to be the first *comedia ranchera* and established Mexican cinema in Latin America.<sup>15</sup> This 1936 film brought to prominence the image of the singing *charro*. King and Carlos Monsiváis, in his article 'Mexican Cinema: of Myths and Demytifications', agree that on one level the singing *charro* represents a reworking of the Gene Autry and Roy Rogers Western, and for this reason I shall include an analysis of Autry's recording of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1940). Both critics point out that on another level, the *charro cantor* is more complex than a mere imitation of Hollywood's singing cowboys. King indicates how the *canción ranchera* became the core of a very successful culture industry. He emphasizes the importance of the music in Mexican films, with its roots in popular culture.

Carlos Monsiváis, offers an important analysis of the development of the *canciones rancheras*, in addition to his studies of popular and mass culture. His articles 'Notas sobre la cultura popular', 'Lola Beltrán que le toquen *Las Golondrinas*' and 'José Alfredo Jiménez', have enabled me to understand the process of development of the *canción ranchera* and the various influences which led to its formation, such as the *corridos*. His work also points to the importance of the link between the *rancheras* and the *mariachi* band which was forged due to the demands of the cinema and radio in Mexico City. His studies on Lucha Reyes have helped me to appreciate the influence on this artiste of the travelling female singers, the *cantadoras*. All this has facilitated my understanding of the co-existence of popular culture and the mass media, and aided my analysis of Reyes' performance of the title song in the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* Monsiváis' examination of the various ways in which people reacted to the image of the *charro* and the *canción ranchera* has enabled me to understand the relationship between media and audience. My approach has also taken on board Monsiváis' analysis of melodrama in the cinema (*A través del espejo*), which he traces back to previous popular forms such as the nineteenth century *folletines* and *novelas por entrega*, the *corridos*, and the popular theatre. His work together with that of Jesús Martín Barbero has given me the tools to trace the figure of the *charro cantor* back to its roots in these popular forms.

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<sup>15</sup>He also directed the 1948 re-make.



There are various books which have contributed to background and factual information on the Mexican cinema. The various volumes of *Historia monumental del cine mexicano* by Emilio García Riera contain synopses of the most important films, which are now accessible through the internet. Together with his own analysis, García Riera's work also includes the views of various other cinema critics, which provide information on the reaction of the critics at the time of the release of the films. Specific information on the two versions of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* is to be found in his book *Fernando de Fuentes* (1984). He includes comments from contemporary critics and the actors who performed in these films and this has provided me with an insight into the way in which people of the time received these films.

Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El cine sonoro*, deals with the advent of the talkies in Mexico and describes the fear that American films would take over the Mexican cinema and even subvert the language. The various articles on Mexican Cinema edited by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá have provided me with further information on the Mexican cinema of the period covered in my research. These include: Tomás Pérez Turrent 'The Studios', Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro 'Origins, Development and Crisis of the Sound Cinema 1929-1964', and Emilio García Riera 'The Impact of Rancho Grande'. Jorge Lozoya in *Cine Mexicano* does not analyse the *comedias rancheras*. However, he agrees with Ayala Blanco that in the 1930s the Mexican cinema absorbed various influences from the *teatro de revista*.

The film director of *Un campeón sin corona* (1945), Alejandro Galindo, in his book *Una radiografía histórica* is quite censorious of the development of the Mexican film industry. He complains that the cinema did not take advantage of the opportunities offered by WWII. His first hand knowledge of the industry has been valuable in filling in the gaps in this research, and his critical approach puts the work of other authorities into perspective.

In *Historia de la música popular mexicana*, Yolanda Moreno Rivas, like Monsiváis, traces the origin of the *charro cantor* back to the first version of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936) starring Tito Guizar. Moreno Rivas is interested in the historical background of the *charro cantor*. She also provides information on the way the image of the *charro cantor* changed from the sensitive, clean-shaven Tito Guizar to the mustachioed *macho valentón*, Jorge Negrete. She too agrees with Monsiváis that the style of the songs changed with the coming of the partnership of the composer Manuel Esperón and the lyricist Ernesto Cortázar. Her work contains some analysis of the *canción ranchera*, and she briefly examines the emergence of the "ídolo" in Negrete and Infante.



Vicente T. Mendoza (*Panorama de la música tradicional de México, El Corrido de la Revolución* and *Corridos mexicanos*), Gabriel Saldivar (*Historia de la música en México*) and Merle Simmons (*The Mexican Corrido as a Source for Interpretative Study of Modern Mexico: 1880-1950*) provide information on the development of the *corridos* and the themes which were used. This information has enabled me to trace the influence of the *corridos* on the *canción ranchera*, and on the image of the *charro*. One particular type of *corrido*, *El valiente* had a marked influence on the image of the *charro*. These writers also trace the influence of real events and actual people such as the nineteenth century bandits on the *corridos*.

There are not many in-depth studies on the history of the *mariachi* bands and their development before and after their arrival in Mexico City. Rafael Hermes in *Origen e historia del mariachi* relates the history of the *mariachi* bands in their native Jalisco. Monsiváis, Yolanda Rivas and Juan S. Garrido provide information on the arrival of these groups in Mexico City and their performances not only in popular theatre but also on the radio. These authors relate how the Mariachi Marmolejo and the band of Silvestre Vargas began to wear *charro* costumes and changed their line-up, and adopted a repertoire of more cheerful tunes in order to accompany radio singers. They do not give us examples of the songs but they describe how the *mariachis* were prepared to adapt according to the demands of the radio and the cinema. Claes af Geijerstan's study, *Popular Music in Mexico*, is quite general but it does have an overview of the development of the *mariachi* band, and also the *Orquesta Típica* and the *corrido*. Sleeve-notes to *Mexican Music: Mariachi II*, 'Origins and History of Mariachi Music', by Federico Sánchez Ventura provide concise information on the history of the *mariachi* bands, especially on their arrival in Mexico City. Gabriel Sosa Plata and Alberto Esquivel in *Las mil y una radios: una historia, un análisis actual de la radiodifusión mexicana* provide a detailed study of the history of the radio station Radio Mil. This book gives useful information on the radio station which competed with XEW and the development of the *mariachi* band in the context of the radio industry of the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s.

Juan S. Garrido was himself a composer of a few *ranchero* songs. His *Historia de la música popular* provides a general chronological overview of the development of Mexican popular music from 1896 to 1973, based on his own archives and personal experience. His work is indispensable as a starting point in the investigation of publication dates, although he admits that some songs have no date of copyright. Tomás Pérez Turrent's brief article included with the CD 'La canción popular en el cine mexicano: 1931-1940' provides information on the importance of music and song in the Mexican Cinema.



The work of the following writers on Mexican popular theatre is extremely useful on the subject of development of the *teatro de género menor* and the *revistas*: Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari, Luis Reyes de la Maza, Guillermo Bonfil and Gerald Martin have all contributed to the understanding of the process of development of the *charro cantor* before its appearance on the screen. The nineteenth and early twentieth century theatre critic Olavarría y Ferrari wrote *Reseña histórica del teatro en México: 1538-1911*, after his death, Salvador Novo continued this work up to 1961. Olavarría y Ferrari provides essential information on the development of the theatre during the *Porfiriato*, especially in terms of its relationship with the government.

In *El teatro en México durante el Porfirismo*, Luis Reyes de la Maza describes the plays performed during this period in which the *charro* is a central character; he also reproduces the comments of contemporary critics in newspapers and magazines, which are important for this study. Gerald Martin in his articles 'The Literature, Music and Art of Latin America: from Independence to 1870' and 'Literature, Music and the Visual Arts: 1870-1930' has contributed to the study of the development of the popular theatre including the *revistas* between those years. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's *El país de las tandas* covers the history of the *revistas* and *tandas* in the theatres Principal and Lírico during the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, giving a description of the content of these shows and the type of songs they included. This is useful in tracing the antecedents of the *rancheras* in which the *charro* is a main character.

For biographical information on the lives of Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante there are many books which are still sold in Mexican newspaper kiosks. The biography of Jorge Negrete by his daughter Diana Negrete presents the human side of the singer. *Jorge Bueno* by Enrique Serna gives a more in-depth analysis of his personal and professional life. The biography of Pedro Infante by his nephew José Ernesto Infante Quintanilla includes specific information on all the films and records which this artist produced. Gustavo Garcia's biography *No me parezco a nadie* also provides a detailed account of the life of Infante.

There are other sources which have contributed to my original research such as the following *folletines* and *novelas por entrega*: *Astucia, el Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama* by Luis G. Inclán, *Los bandidos de Río Frío* by Manuel Payno, *El Zarco* by Ignacio Manuel Altamirano and *Los de abajo* by Mariano Azuela. Memoirs of the nineteenth and early twentieth century provide an insight into the social and political situation in Mexico in different periods and have helped me to appreciate its popular culture with their descriptions of the costumes, the bandits, the music and dances of *el pueblo*, the *cantinas* and the *pulquerías* which constitute the influences of popular culture on the *comedias rancheras*. Antonio García



Cubas in *El libro de mis recuerdos*, describes encounters with the bandits *Los plateados*, the *pulquerías* and the type of serials people read at that time. Guillermo Prieto's writings on the *cantinas* in *Memorias de mis tiempos*, provide a glimpse of the places where poor people entertained themselves, later to feature in the *ranchero* films. The various compilations of articles written in the early nineteenth century by journalists, such as Angel de Campo's *Pueblo y canto*, also reveal aspects of the society of the time. The memoirs of Salvador Novo from the 1940s and the 1950s fill in the background to the period of development of the *charro cantor*. My archival research into the newspaper *El Universal* of the 1920s period enabled me to discover the opinions of the journalists with regards to the advent of the American "talkies".

As other researchers have pointed out, there is no unified cinematic archival system in Mexico; there is no national broadcasting company, thus, much of the recorded material remains in private hands. We must bear in mind the discontinuities of Mexican history. The films in question were not available at the National Cinemathèque in Mexico City but could be traced through the Cinemathèque-UNAM. After conducting research at this university, I have selected three films for detailed analysis: *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (two versions 1936 and 1948), *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* (1941) and *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* (1952). I developed a new approach to the analysis of the songs in these films by examining them in their cinematic settings. Through this approach I engage in what, to my knowledge, is the first comparison between the Mexican *charros cantores* and the work of the American singing cowboys, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers.

The musical archives at the National Library provided the relevant books but the audio material had to be tracked down from various commercial outlets. Historical recordings from the early days of the Mexican theatre were traced through family, friends and commercial sources. Thus, the academic sources have been complemented by the recollections of the last surviving witnesses from this era, who were able to supply the cultural references which would otherwise have been lost. The witnesses I interviewed ranged from fellow actors and directors (such as Marga López and the film director Miguel Zacarías), contemporaries of the stars, and people like Amparo Robles, the president of the Pedro Infante fan club; there were also cinema audience members and the listening public, including interviews with Rafaela Guido, whom I interviewed in 1996 and 2002. She lived through the period of the Agrarian Reform and, as a young girl, made the transition from the countryside to the city and worked as an extra in the film studio Azteca, where she met Negrete and other actors. She was able to supply valuable information from her personal experience. An interview with Manuel Esperón, the last surviving composer from the heyday of *canción ranchera*, gave me the benefit of his reminiscences on the singers Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante and Lucha Reyes. This cast new light on the atmosphere of this period. My interview with the cultural historian



Carlos Monsiváis helped me to understand the process of development of the genre of the *canción ranchera*: thus I was better able to analyse the songs in the films. Interviews with the relatives of Jorge Negrete, especially Tere de Negrete who shared with me her memories, influenced my choice of which films and songs to study. José Ernesto Infante Quintanilla, the nephew of Pedro Infante also gave me valuable insight into the life of the singer and pointed out other sources of information.

### 3. Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter 1 I focus on *melodrama*, which will be understood in this study as what Martín Barbero calls: “the history of the modes of narrating and organizing the mise-en-scène of mass culture.”<sup>16</sup> It represents a stage in the process of development of the mass media from which the image of the *charro* as a bandit can be traced back to previous modes of narrating. These include nineteenth century serials, popular theatre and popular forms such as the settings in the fairs. The development of the image of the *charro* can be seen within the entertainment industry and in the narrative of the *corridos*, serenades and the *canciones rancheras* themselves. Thus, the *rancheras* formed a mediation between the old popular culture and the new urban culture. Section 1 traces some of the characteristics of the image of the *charro* in the *comedias rancheras* back to the nineteenth century bandit/outlaw/highwayman in the narratives of the *folletines* and *novelas por entrega*. This section starts by outlining the features of the melodrama in the serial, among them a strong kinship with oral narrative. It also analyses how the writers and the readers of the serials influenced each other. Four *folletines* and *novelas por entrega* will be studied: *Astucia: El Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama* (1866) by Luis Gonzaga Inclán and *Los bandidos de Río Frío* (published simultaneously between 1888-1891 in Mexico and Spain) by Manuel Payno, together with *El Zarco* (1901 published posthumously) by Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, and *Los de abajo* (published in instalments in a newspaper in the second half of 1915 in El Paso, Texas) by Mariano Azuela. These are now considered part of the canon of Mexican literature; although they were not written as serials they were initially published in this form and have some of the characteristics of serials (short episodes and elements of popular culture such as songs). Section 2 also traces the characteristics of melodrama - time, recognition and morality - back to the narratives of *Astucia* and *Los bandidos de Río Frío*.

Chapter 2 examines how melodrama incorporated true contemporary events and people

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<sup>16</sup>Martín Barbero, *Communication*, p. 119. It is not the intention of this study to examine the melodrama as part of film reception theory and gender theory. For the application of these theories on film see E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The mother in popular culture and melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992). She understands as melodrama the genre used by Hollywood to exploit a lucrative female audience. In Mexico the *comedias rancheras* are not strictly melodramas in this sense, this genre was not made to target only a female audience.



with whom the public could identify in its narratives. Section 1 looks at the influence on the serials of two nineteenth-century gangs of real bandits: *Los charros contrabandistas de la rama* (tobacco smugglers) and *Los plateados*. It also observes how the *charro* costume, a rural outfit with exaggerated silver studs, was a recognizable characteristic of these bandits, intended to display their status. Section 2 on the *corridos* will concentrate on three types of narratives which would influence the *charro cantor* and his repertoire: the songs dealing with bandits/outlaws; *corridos* on famous Mexican bullfighters and horsemen such as Bernardo Gaviño and Ponciano Díaz; and the type of *corridos* called *valientes* -old narratives making fun of the *bravura* of the hero.

Chapter 3 examines the development of the *charro* from the nineteenth century entertainment industry to the Porfirio Díaz regime and the post-revolutionary period. Section 1 deals with the development of the image of the *charro* in the *teatro de género menor*. It examines the influence of the *zarzuela* and *charrería* on Mexican theatre. It also deals with the lack of support of the Díaz dictatorship for Mexican writers, and the influence of Mexican popular theatre. This section also deals with the post-revolutionary period especially the governments of Álvaro Obregón (1920-24) and Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) and their support for popular culture, and their appropriation of the *charro* as a representation of Mexican culture. Section 2 studies how the image of the *charro* began to be associated with the *mariachi* band in Mexico City due to the development of the radio industry in the 1930s. It also deals with the relationship between the government of Cárdenas and popular culture. This section follows the development of the *mariachis* in the context of the radio industry up to 1952.

Chapter 4 is a summary of the development of the *charro cantor* within the context of the film industry from the 1920s to 1952. This chapter studies the attitudes of the governments towards the development of the film industry. It is divided into three main sections. Section 1 studies the development of the cinema during the post-revolutionary period in the 1920s and the apprehension about the effects of the 'talkies' upon the Spanish language and Mexican culture. Section 2 deals with the 1930s and the birth of the *charro cantor* in the "talkies". In this section the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas is important because of his support for the development of the film industry and, as previously mentioned in Chapter 3, the incorporation of the *charro* and the *mariachis* as part of the nationalism of this period. Section 3 moves to the development of the cinema during the presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-46) which covers the period of WWII, and the significance of the American Good Neighbour Policy for the Mexican cinema. It also deals with the decline of the film industry during the presidency of Miguel Alemán Valdéz which ended in 1952.



In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I will analyse the development of the *charro cantor* in the cinema. I have chosen three key films in order to observe the changes that the *charro* and the *canciones rancheras* went through in their media presentation. Each chapter will analyse the songs in the context of the settings in which they were included in the films. This will allow me to observe the process of development of the *charro cantor* and the *canción ranchera* at key moments of change 1936, 1941 and 1952. Chapter 5 studies the two versions of the film *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, by the same director Fernando de Fuentes. The first version in 1936 made Tito Guizar the first internationally recognized *charro cantor*. The term was not used but he set the foundation for the later development of this image. The second version in 1948 consolidated the fame of Jorge Negrete, already a star. Section 1 will examine the views of the critics of the 1936 version, in order to understand the impact of this film in the development of the *charro cantor* and the *canción ranchera*. In the next five sections, I will study the ways in which the songs were used in this film and its 1948 remake. This film follows a pattern in which the songs are placed in settings which seem to be “real” situations. This trend continued in the films that followed. Section 2 deals with the family party and the song *Allá en el Rancho Grande*. Section 3 analyses the serenade and the song *Ojos Tapatíos* sung by Jorge Negrete. Section 5 looks at the *palenque* and the dances and songs performed there: the dance *El Jarabe Tapatío* and the song *El Gallero* by Negrete. Section 6 studies the song *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and the duel of words performed in the two film versions respectively by Guizar and Negrete in the *cantina*, now very similar to the *pulquería* (a public drinking house selling the native drink *pulque* made from maguey). Section 7 briefly studies similar social types as singer-performers, the two American Singing Cowboys, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, focusing on the version of the song *Allá en el Rancho Grande* recorded by Autry in 1940.

Chapter 6 examines the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* (1941) and the marketing of Jorge Negrete as the *Charro Cantor*. The intention of this chapter is to examine the changes in the image of the *charro* from Tito Guizar to Jorge Negrete and the singing style of Lucha Reyes and her influence on the *rancheras*. Section 1 will examine the film in relation to the novel *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes! o la Guerra Santa*, by Aurelio R. Castillo on which the film was based. Section 2 examines how the songs are used in the *palenque* and the performance of the singer Lucha Reyes with her song *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* and her influence on the *rancheras*. Section 3 examines the performance of the song *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* by Jorge Negrete and the *mariachis* in El Parián, a type of *cantina*/restaurant. Section 4 examines the setting of songs in the serenade *Traigo un Amor* by Jorge Negrete and the duel of songs between Negrete and his rival.

Chapter 7 analyses the settings of songs in the film *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* (1952). The

purpose of this chapter is to study the first and last screen performance together on screen of the two “rival” *charros* Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante. This section looks at the different styles of singing of the two singers: Negrete projects the songs while Infante is more intimate in his performance. Their roles in this film and their performances were carefully planned so that each one had equal status in the film. Section 1 will look at the setting of the song in a place which could be seen by the audience as a *cantina*, restaurant or *fonda* (a cheap eating place). The song *La Tertulia* sung by Pedro Infante belongs to a series of comic *corridos* whose lyrics are closer to city life. This section will examine how the *rancheras* were introducing various urban elements by this time. Section 2 studies the songs in the family party. This part will study the song *La gloria eres tú* sung by Pedro Infante, followed by the duel of words between Negrete and Infante. Section 3 studies the serenade, a medley of songs made famous by Negrete and Infante. These include *Serenata Tapatía*, *Alevántate* and *Ojos Tapatíos*. Section 4 will look at the finale of the film, a birthday party in which the song *Fiesta Mexicana* is sung by the two *charros* Negrete and Infante, recreating the style of the 1940s *ranchera* songs. The Appendix is a brief biography of Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante to give further information about two of the main representatives of the *charro cantor* in this period.



## CHAPTER 1. THE *CHARRO* IN NARRATIVE: *FOLLETINES* AND *NOVELAS POR ENTREGA*

The *charro cantor*, who appeared in the cinema's *comedias rancheras*, is identified by the critics with melodrama: key elements being the theatrical costume, the repertoire and over-emotional style of singing. It is interpreted as the media's "creation" of sentimentality, sensationalism and exaggeration.<sup>1</sup> In his study of melodrama in the Mexican media, Monsiváis starts with a working definition which suggests a widely held view in Mexico: "Drama acompañado de música instrumental en varios pasajes, que exageran los trazos sentimentales y patéticos con menoscabo del buen gusto."<sup>2</sup> Monsiváis uses irony as a method of exposing these opinions and he explores other ways of analysing melodrama as a cultural form, and this allows us to look at the media, as part of the process of the development of mass culture. He points out that to understand melodrama in the media it is necessary to look at previous popular forms such as the nineteenth century *novelas de folletín*, *seriadas*, *por entrega* and the popular theatre.<sup>3</sup> Martín Barbero makes a similar proposition, emphasizing that the history of melodrama is: "the history of the modes of narrating and organizing the *mise-en scène* of mass culture".<sup>4</sup> Then he adds that it is important to look at "how melodrama mediates between the folkloric culture of the country fairs and the urban-popular culture of the spectacle, the emerging mass culture. This is a mediation which on the level of narrative forms, goes ahead through serial novels in newspapers, to the shows of the music hall and to cinema."<sup>5</sup> One can add to this the *corrido* and its production in *hojas sueltas* by the end of the nineteenth century.

The *charro cantor* emerged in the media in the 1930s, a period of migration to the cities due to the accelerated urbanization which had already begun at the end of the nineteenth century with the introduction of the railways. This, together with the modernization of the economic modes of production and the various social movements such as the *Cristero* Revolt (1927-29) and the Lázaro Cárdenas (1936-40)

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<sup>1</sup>See the opinions of the cinema critic Luz Alba (Cube Bonifante) in the 1930s after the release of the film *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, in Emilio García Riera, *Fernando de Fuentes* (México: Cineteca Nacional Centro de Capacitación de Investigaciones, 1984), p. 138; in the 1960s cinema critic Jorge Ayala Blanco, *La aventura del cine mexicano* (México: ERA, 1968), pp. 64-84; Claudia Shaefer, *Textured Lives. Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1992), p. 93; Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, 'Ten Reasons to Love or Hate Mexican Cinema', in *Mexican Cinema*, ed. Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 1-10 (p. 4).

<sup>2</sup>Carlos Monsiváis and Carlos Bonfil, *A través del espejo; el cine mexicano y su público* (México: El Milagro, 1994), p. 99. As previously stated in the introduction, I am not dealing with reception and gender theories in this study.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup>Jesús Martín Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 119.

<sup>5</sup>*Idem*



government's *Reforma Agraria*, forced people to leave the countryside for the city.<sup>6</sup> For these people, now part of the urban masses, melodrama acted as a mediation between their rural memory and the pressures of the urbanized environment. As Martín Barbero points out: "in the form of a tango, a soap opera, a Mexican film or a cheap crime story, the melodrama taps into and stirs up a deep vein of collective cultural imagination. And there is no access to historical memory or projection of dreams into the future which does not pass through this cultural imagination".<sup>7</sup> This is crucial in the study of melodrama because it allows us to analyse its specific narrative characteristics: time, morality and recognition. These ideas take us to the area of reception and this enables us to understand the relationship between the media and the audience.

The *charro* will be looked at as a transitional figure, the product of a rural memory which was becoming urbanized in the process of development of mass culture: "a form of recovery of popular memory through the cultural images produced by the culture industry and a metaphor indicating the different presence of the people in the masses".<sup>8</sup> Thus, in this chapter, I will discuss the inter-relatedness of the writer and reader of the *folletines* and *novelas por entrega* and how the oral quality persisted in these narratives. I will also trace three elements of melodrama: time, recognition and morality, which are present in the *comedias rancheras*, back to two serials which contain the *charro* as a main character: *Astucia: El Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama* by Luis G. Inclán and *Los bandidos de Río Frío* by Manuel Payno.

## 1.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WRITER AND THE READER: THE ORAL QUALITY OF THE *FOLLETINES* AND THE *NOVELAS POR ENTREGA*

Examination of the *comedias rancheras* reveal that they all have something in common: they have all been influenced by previous popular forms such as the *novelas de folletín* and the *teatro de género menor*. These forms in turn have strong influences from the rural popular culture of the nineteenth century including its oral culture. To understand the 'dialectic' relationship between the audience and the film makers, the relationship between the writer of serials and the reader will be examined. Martín

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<sup>6</sup>Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996* (New York: HCarlosarper Perennial, 1998), p. 423. According to this author more than 70, 000 people died in that revolt; from 1926 to 1930 there was a fall of 38% in agricultural production. During this period 200,000 people from the countryside moved to the cities and a further 450,00 emigrated to the US. Regarding the *Reforma Agraria* land was given to the *campesinos*, however, this did little to alleviate rural poverty and people continued to leave the countryside.

<sup>7</sup>Martín Barbero, *Communication*, p. 225.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 228.



Barbero points out that in this relationship the readers did not simply allow themselves to be absorbed into the world of the writer but “the world of the reader penetrated the process of writing and left footprints in the text”.<sup>9</sup> He adds that this relationship is not a one way process from the writer to the reader but a ‘dialectic’: the writer influenced the reader but the reader, still under the impact of a strong oral culture, affected the development of the serial. Martín Barbero posits four levels of analysis which reveal the influence of the cultural universe of the masses in the serial.

The first two levels relate to the physical presentation of the serial. For Barbero, the first level is the physical organization of the text and the layout of the type. The material was arranged in a certain way not just for commercial reasons but because of the limitations of the readers; it was an attempt to facilitate the process of reading for inexperienced readers through the use of large type fonts. The format with wide margins and a large space between the lines helped people who were relatively unskilled in reading and still immersed in an oral culture. Many serials also had illustrations which would aid the reader to follow the story. The second level deals with the way the text is divided into paragraphs and chapters. This also concerns the length of sentences and the division into episodes and the way the episodes are presented, including the chapter titles. This division of the text, to paraphrase Martín Barbero, was necessary for the unskilled reader whose reading habits limited his ability to read long, continuous text.<sup>10</sup>

These two levels lead us to the third and fourth level which influence the content of the narrative. The third level has two main aspects: the organization into episodes and the open structure of the serial. In the organization into episodes there are two mechanisms at work: timing and suspense. Concerning timing, the division of the narrative into episodes allows the writer to use the duration of time to lure the reader into the story and cause him to identify with the characters. The episodes are of a length appropriate to the lifestyle of the reader. Furthermore, this sense of duration in the narrative creates in the reader the impression of reality which connects the fictional story with everyday life.

Rhythm and the duration of time test the writer’s skill and ability to attract new readers to the serial and still retain the attention of the old readers. This, together with the openness of the structure, helps the author by introducing into the narrative contemporary events familiar to the reader, making the time of the narrative coincide with the events of the day. This strong relationship between the actuality of the day and the narrative of the *folletines*, has passed into the *comedias rancheras* and into the soap operas of recent times. This connection between the time in the narrative and the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>10</sup>Idem



time of real events enables the writer to use popular narrative -the oral style of the narrator: "the serial brings a new relationship of writing to language...it breaks writing away from the canons of the text and opens it to the popular narrative, a logic of oral 'telling to someone' directly present."<sup>11</sup> In the *folletines* the narrator takes over the role of the storyteller from the days of oral culture. As for suspense, three elements should be considered: mystery, surprise, and the use of the "cliff-hanger" technique.<sup>12</sup> And we can add misunderstandings which make the reader participate in the story, taking sides and following the story waiting for recognition, punishment and reward.

The fourth level is recognition. Martín Barbero points out that the term recognition must be taken to mean here that the reader can identify with the characters and recognize elements of his own life in the narrative. The hero now ceases to be a remote figure, but the kind of person one might meet every-day, with just enough invention to stimulate the imagination of the reader.<sup>13</sup> However, recognition also works at another level, closely linked with misunderstandings and suspense. The reader knows the true identity of the characters and participates in the narrative by following the adventures of the various characters.

Thus, recognition leads us to another element of the dramatic structure of melodrama: morality. In melodrama, the structure is polarized and schematized, demonstrating a strong kinship with oral narrative and the characters appear to have no depth: they are divided into the good ones and the bad ones.<sup>14</sup> The characters are two dimensional, lacking psychological depth. The "good" are rewarded and the 'bad' are punished. However, what is good and bad is relative to the logic of the story. The hero or heroine is in a world ruled by sentiments, thus his/her conflict with reality is moral. With a main plot and various subplots the villains are recognized, unmasked and punished and the good characters rewarded. These aspects will be treated in more detail in the next section.

This relationship between the writer of serials and the reader is similar to the relationship between a narrator/storyteller and a listener. Walter Benjamin points out that a narrative which is meant to be read does not have the same structure as a narrative which is to be told orally.<sup>15</sup> However, the serial, although written, has an oral quality which changes the relationship between the writer and his work obliging him to follow the structure of the oral narrative. This also changes the relationship between the reader and the narrative; it makes the reader more a listener than a reader in the modern

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-32.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 133-34.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>15</sup>Idem



sense.<sup>16</sup>

These characteristics of the serial made it the perfect vehicle in Mexico for writers with no previous practice in writing fiction and a public with high levels of illiteracy. *Folletines* began to appear in Mexico in 1844, at a time when the nation-state was still being formed. Mexico has been a colony and its publications in the early part of the nineteenth century had been strictly controlled by the Spanish Crown, and the Church which imposed censorship through the Inquisition. With the Wars of Independence (1810-1821) some of the Spanish Crown's prohibitions on writing, printing and therefore the reading of non-religious narratives were abolished. After the proclamation of the freedom of the press in the Cádiz Constitution of 1812 and the Wars of Independence, political writing became a priority and flourished. Various types of political writing thrived: "Civic" poetry dominated by Andrés Quintana Roo (1787-1851) together with other types such as the *proclama*, la *arenga* and the *folleto*. The new freedom offered writers the opportunity to develop techniques of self expression and journalists began to experiment in writing fiction.

It is from this period that what is considered the first Mexican novel, *El Periquillo Sarniento* was written by the journalist Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi (1776-1827). This writer used his nom-de-plume *El Pensador Mexicano*, as the name of his weekly, an influential political publication in this period. *El Periquillo Sarniento*, (1816), a late picaresque story, suited the writer's intention of criticizing the society of the period. It also fulfilled the aim of teaching and educating the reader. It was modelled on the Spanish picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*, which had already been published as a serial in the French press. *Periquillo* has an oral quality, a characteristic of the serials. In this narrative the act of story-telling and listening is represented in various ways: the main character, Perico, now reformed and an old man, relates the adventures and misadventures of his life to his children. The writer becomes the narrator, the storyteller who, speaking in the first person, tells the story to his children, they in turn just like the reader, become the listener. Suspense is maintained by the mystery and the surprise of the life of the narrator going from one vicissitude to another. Another technique of recreating an oral narrative is to use the dialogue with oral expressions such as "le dije", "me dijo". The writer also mocks the use of Latin, a learned language which is out place in an every day conversation. For example in the dialogue between Perico and the local doctor, Dr. Purgante:

-Es verdad, señor, le dije; pero no había venido de vergüenza, y me ha pesado porque en estos días he vendido para comer mi capote, chupa y

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<sup>16</sup>Idem



pañuelo. ¡Qué estulticia! -exclamó el doctor-; la *verecundia* es *optime bona* (muy buena) cuando la origina crimen de *cogitatio*, más no cuando se comete *involuntarie* pues si en aquel *hic et nunc* (ésto es, en aquel acto) supiera el individuo que hacía mal *absque dubio* (sin duda) se abstendría de comentarlo. En fin hijo carísimo ¿tú quieres quedarte en mi servicio y ser mi consodal *in perpetuum* (para siempre)? -Sí señor le respondí. -Pues bien. En esta *domo* (casa) tendrás *in primis* (desde luego) en primer lugar el *panem nostrum quotidianum* (el pan de cada día).<sup>17</sup>

In the dialogue between Perico and Doctor Purgante the latter mixes Spanish with a few phrases picked up from legal and Church Latin to impress the boy with his status and learning. The writer and reader collude in this mockery of the doctor's pomposity. At the end of the narrative, Perico advises his children to learn from his mistakes. As in many of the *folletines*, the reader is presented with a moral.<sup>18</sup>

The desire to create a "national culture" continued throughout the middle of the nineteenth century. From the informal meeting of a group of friends, the *Academia de Letrán* (1836 -1856) was formed. Some of its members such as Ignacio Rodríguez Galván, Guillermo Prieto and Ignacio Ramírez, "El Nigromante", influenced by European romanticism, began to 'Mexicanize' literature, to write about Mexican themes and people. Although they rejected Spanish literature in their search for a national literature, they were still influenced by other European countries such as England and France. Thus by the middle of the nineteenth century, the French serialized melodramas, which had started in Paris in the 1830's, found fertile ground in Mexico. With direct influence from Eugene Sue's *Mysteries of Paris* (1842-1843) and *The Wandering Jew* (1844-1845), the Mexican writer Justo Sierra O'Reilly wrote the first *folletín* *La Hija del Judío* (1844). This was followed by other writers, among them Manuel Payno, who published *El fistol del Diablo* between 1845-1846. These *novelas de folletín* were published in newspapers. A few decades later the *novelas por entrega* appeared, each episode of which was sold separately for a few cents: "a una cuartilla de real, es decir, a tres centavos cada una".<sup>19</sup>

However, there were still various journalists and writers outside the established literary circles. These independent writers were free to write what they chose, but faced with the

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<sup>17</sup>José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, *Periquillo Sarniento*, 4th edn (México: Porrúa, 1962), p. 217.

<sup>18</sup>In 1931, the *Teatro Iris* put on the *revista El Periquillo Sarniento* written by Juan Bustillo Oro and Mauricio Magdaleno (both were later film directors and script writers for the cinema) based on Lizardi's work.

<sup>19</sup>Manuel Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, 2nd edn (México: Porrúa, 1964), p. vii.



need to earn a living were obliged to consider the requirements of the public. One of the most interesting of these writers was Luis G. Inclán (1816-1875) whose narrative *Astucia: El Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o Los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama* (1866) deserves examination. Inclán was an outsider who did not belong to the literary groups and academies of the period. Although he was popular with the public, he was ignored by the official literary establishment of his day. His work was rescued during the post-revolutionary period and then became part of "Mexican literature". Inclán was a *ranchero* and *charro*, who after the American Intervention in 1847 lost his rural property and came to Mexico City where he bought a small printing house and a lithograph business. From his printing house he published works dealing with Mexican themes such as *El Jarabe*, *Obra de Costumbres Mexicanas* by Niceto de Zamacois (1860) and an edition of *El Periquillo Sarniento* by Joaquín Fernández de Lizarde.<sup>20</sup> In 1866 during the Maximilian Empire he wrote and published *Astucia* using his unique position as a writer and printer to obtain the copyright.

He and other writers of the period were commonly, to use the cliché, "inspired by the world around them": the diversity of people, their costumes and their speech. However, many of the writers of the literary establishment such as Guillermo Prieto were interested in interpreting popular culture and elevating it to the level of "literature". An example is Prieto's *El Romance de la Migajita*, in which, in the form of a *romance*, the writer described the life of the *Migajita*, an inhabitant of the poor *barrios* of Mexico City. In this *romance* there is a contrast between the formality of the literary structure and the writer's elaborate description and use of the language of the inhabitants of the *barrios*. Inclán, in contrast, was a former *ranchero* who wrote about rural life using the structure of the *folletines* to reinterpret it. Before *Astucia* he had written pamphlets and *hojas volantes* on rural topics, among them *Reglas con que un colegial pueda colear y lazar* from which he included some passages in *Astucia*. He was probably one of the first to put in writing the rules of the modern *charrería*. Inclán's own works were not read in literary circles, but were bought by the public in great numbers from street vendors. In his memoirs of the 1860s and 1870s García Cubas described one of the types of street vendors carrying works by Inclán:

El mercero...vendía su mercancía. En la canasta que llevaba al brazo hallábase contenida toda una mercería. Agujas, alfileres, dedales... prendedores, aretes, Lavalles y Catecismos de Ripalda, de ediciones económicas, versos y ejemplares por Inclán y Sixto Casillas, juegos de la Oca y del Sitio de Sebastopol, juguetes para los niños y otras

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<sup>20</sup>Luis G. Inclán, *Astucia: El Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama* (México: Porrúa, 1966), p. xi.



Inclán's works were sold in Mexico City and its surroundings, and what makes his work different from other narratives is the use of the regional expressions of the area of Michoacán. This use of local language with its non-standard usage and regional pronunciation without "correction" by the writer was an innovation and caused great controversy among the academic writers concentrated in Mexico City. After Luis González Obregón began the process of official recognition of Inclán and his inclusion in the canon of national literature in 1908, various critics complained about the writer's choice of language. Francisco Pimentel reacted angrily to Inclán's use of the "bastardía del lenguaje o dialecto mexicano" stating that a writer should employ this language only "cuando el autor de una novela supone que en ella figuran mexicanos que usan ese dialecto, pero no cuando habla el escritor mismo, en el cual caso sólo es lícito admitir neologismos por conveniencia o por necesidad".<sup>22</sup> At the time, it was said that *Astucia* was read more than *El Periquillo* by Lizardi, but Francisco Pimentel praised the latter arguing that it had more depth. He added that in *Astucia* the regional language used was a dialect of Spanish: "En esa novela puede estudiarse en todo su desarrollo lo que hemos llamado alguna vez *dialecto mexicano*, es decir, el idioma español según se habla en México, entre la gente mal educada, ese lenguaje corrompido, adulterado".<sup>23</sup> Federico Gamboa, the writer of the "best seller" *Santa*, in 1914 preferred not to make any comments on the inclusion of regional language and instead praised the "localismo agresivo y soberano, que ensancha hasta lo trascendental y realza hasta la hermosura sus cualidades y primores".<sup>24</sup>

Manuel Payno, a politician who managed to combine his political career with writing, was another popular writer of *novelas por entrega*. He was a member of the *Academia de Letrán* and achieved some success with his first *novela por entrega*, *El Fistol del Diablo* (published between 1845-1846). In a newspaper article in 1893 the writer and journalist Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera commented with sarcasm on how Payno made money from his work and on his lack of professionalism as a writer, since he did not have a complete plan of his work:

Ese *Fistol del Diablo* se publicó por entregas dando provecho a los editores y el autor. Y es curioso saber cómo escribió esa novela. No tenía

<sup>21</sup>Antonio García Cubas, *El libro de mis recuerdos*, 7th edn (México: Patria, 1978), p. 288. The bold typing in this quote is mine.

<sup>22</sup>Inclán, (1966), p. ix.

<sup>23</sup>Idem

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. x.



plan ninguno, se le olvidaban hasta los nombres de los personajes que ponía en juego... escribía sobre una tabla puesta en las rodillas, la entrega del día siguiente.<sup>25</sup>

Gutiérrez Nájera did not mention Payno's recent *novela por entrega*, *Los bandidos de Río Frío* (1889-1891) which appeared simultaneously in Mexico and Barcelona. This may be because it was printed under the pseudonym *Un ingenio de la corte*. This is now the narrative for which he is most remembered. The work has identifiable characteristics of the *novelas por entrega*: the physical presentation makes it easy to read, although it is very long, the story is divided into episodes and each one assists the reader with a brief subtitle; each episode starts with a brief introduction reminding the reader who the character is or introducing and linking the new character with the story; when each episode changes from one character to another the writer briefly reminds the reader of the background of this character, thus it is easy to follow the story as a whole. This technique allowed the original reader to follow the story and, at the same time, made it easy for the new reader to pick up the story. He used the cliff-hanger technique: the short episodes finish on a note of suspense. Then the reader has to wait for a few instalments to follow a particular adventure while at the same time he is presented with another piece of the jigsaw. The characteristics of melodrama are present: intrigue and suspense in every *entrega* or episode; morality, that is good and evil, and the punishment of the latter; recognition and the family, mother of a long-lost son, son and father of a long-lost mother, which lead to several sub-plots. And also recognition in the sense of the reader's identification with the characters. These aspects will be dealt with in greater detail in the next section.

In his first edition, Payno subtitled the novel "naturalista, humorística, de costumbres, de crímenes y de horrores". In his introduction Payno states clearly that he wants his work to be read by everybody "aún por las personas más comedidas y timoratas".<sup>26</sup> He reaches his public by a style which flows as if somebody was telling a tale, it is the oral quality of the narrative more than the written that keeps the reader (listener) attracted to the story: "esa misma naturaleza conversable de su estilo le da a su prosa, si no elegancia ni decoro, una cierta fluidez sencilla y amena".<sup>27</sup> Payno employs his own voice as a narrator but his characters use popular expressions and sayings, among them "Jalisco nunca pierde", which was adopted as a catch phrase by the *canciones rancheras* and also films with such titles as *Hasta que perdió Jalisco*. Although he set his story in the past Payno's detailed description of Mexico City and the inclusion of

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<sup>25</sup>Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, ed. by Rafael Pérez Gay (México: Cal y Arena, 1996), p. 540.

<sup>26</sup>Payno, p. x.

<sup>27</sup>Idem



recognizable places enabled the reader to identify them. The reader moves with the characters in various circles: from the city palaces to the slums; the rural world is not static either but moves with the people from the ranches to the city markets and the canals and to the outskirts of the city. These are worlds which move apart but cross paths frequently in markets, ports and roads.

The end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, with the changes from the *Porfiriato* to the Post-revolutionary era, is a period of transition from the *novela por entrega* and *folletín* to the novel as a complete literary work. The works of both Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834-1893), *El Zarco* and Mariano Azuela (1873-1952), *Los de Abajo*, still have elements of the *novela por entrega*. Ignacio M. Altamirano who was an established writer, sold the copyright of thirteen chapters (half of this work) of his novel *El Zarco: Episodios de la vida mexicana en 1861-63* to J. Ballezá, a publisher in Barcelona in 1887. Altamirano had already read these chapters to the members of the Liceo Hidalgo in 1886. Although his style is very different from the other writers and his aim was to write for everybody in order to educate the people, he was nevertheless influenced by certain characteristics of the serials. He was inspired by rural popular culture and based his narrative on *El Zarco*, the leader of *Los plateados*, the bandits who fought on the side of the Republic during the French invasion. The structure of the novel in short episodes follows the *novela por entrega*. The complete narrative was published posthumously as a novel in 1901.<sup>28</sup> It was made into a film during the silent era, and in 1925, during a period of strong nationalism, was adapted for the theatre.

Of the many writings by Mariano Azuela, who is now considered the father of the novel of the *Revolución*, the novel *Los de abajo* is the best known. This is not a *novela por entrega* in structure, but rather in the way it was first published and the way he introduced popular culture such as songs into the narrative; and the rural language of towns in the state of Jalisco. It appeared in instalments in the newspaper *El Paso del Norte*, in El Paso, Texas, during the second half of 1915, just after the writer's involvement in the Revolution of 1910. The subsequent editions of *Los de abajo* were revised and corrected by Azuela. This narrative was influenced by French naturalism and unlike some of the texts of this period, it is a critical comment on the Mexican Revolution, pointing out that the majority of the people who took part in the Revolution did so because of circumstances rather than because of ideological beliefs. However, this narrative was taken as representative of the writings of the Revolution, in which the main characters were "el pueblo". In the 20s the Mexican critics discovered *Los de abajo* and called Azuela the father of the novels of the Revolution. By the late 20s and early 30s it was translated into French, English and German. In 1939

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<sup>28</sup>Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, *El Zarco y La navidad en las montañas* (México: Porrúa, 1967), p. xix.



Chano Urueta made a film of this work.

By the 1940s, Azuela, now recognized as part of official literary circles, included the works of Payno and Inclán as “genuinamente nacional” in a series of conferences about Mexican literature.<sup>29</sup> In this period of nationalism, the desire to form an “official” national literature led to the rediscovery and reevaluation of neglected nineteenth century *novelas por entrega and folletines* which were raised to the level of “novels”. By this time, the initial relationship between the writer and the public had changed. These serials were published as books to be sold in bookshops in contrast to their original form when they were published in installments and sold by street vendors.

This coincided with the development of the publishing industry in the country. In 1944 the bookshop Porrúa reorganized and set up its own publishing house, thus having control of the publication and the distribution of their books. The same year this house began to publish a series of texts by Mexican writers in the *Colección de Escritores Mexicanos* which included various authors from the colonial period and the nineteenth century, a new venture in Mexican publishing. A disciple of José Vasconcelos, Salvador Novo, a poet, author and later *Cronista de la Ciudad de México*, had “discovered” these nineteenth century Mexican narratives.<sup>30</sup> He wrote in his diary, in 1946:

Me ha invadido, por lo visto, una repentina, apasionada afición por nuestro siglo XIX que, si en otros aspectos, como la decoración interior, ya se me había manifestado, me era inédita en punto al aprecio y al disfrute de nuestra literatura y nuestra vida de entonces. Supongo que le debo a *Astucia* esta inclinación, y esta sospecha de que nuestra literatura de esa época merece una nueva revisión más atenta y menos jactanciosa que la que le hemos hasta ahora consagrado.<sup>31</sup>

The *Astucia* he refers to is the serial *Astucia o Los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama* by Luis G. Inclán, whose prologue he wrote for the first edition, in 1946, for the publishing house Porrúa. However, in his diary Novo points out that the editor was complaining that three thousand books by a Mexican writer would take a long time to sell. Novo was also passionate about the other nineteenth century serial *Los bandidos de Río Frío* by Manuel Payno of which he says, “me he vuelto un propagandista furioso”. However, when he recommended it to one of his friends, Jorge Rubio, he had

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<sup>29</sup>Payno, without page number.

<sup>30</sup>Salvador Novo, *La vida en México en el período presidencial de Manuel Ávila Camacho* (México: Conacultur, 1994), pp. 607-8.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 619.

already heard it on the radio:

Cuál no sería mi sorpresa al averiguar que él ya conocía a todos los personajes: al licenciado Lamparilla, a Cecilia la frutera, a Evaristo, a Juan Robreño. Yo ignoraba que todas las mañanas, una estación de radio escenifica esta novelota, y que Jorge la escucha cuando no lo molestan demasiado sus ingenieros, mientras visita sus obras y les aguarda en el coche.<sup>32</sup>

The original relationship between the writer of the serial and the readers/listeners had been lost when these narratives were printed as books for the literate urban population. However, various elements, among them the oral quality of the narrative, were recovered by the serials on the radio and in the films. Just as the *folletines* had been influenced by the needs of the reader in the way they were physically presented and typed and the use of melodrama in its content, the media were now reworking and reinventing these characteristics of the serial and other popular forms. The *charro cantor* and the *comedias rancheras* were part of a process of massification which had started with the availability of printing in the nineteenth century. The media - cinema and radio - were continuing this process.<sup>33</sup>

## **1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF MELODRAMA: TIME, RECOGNITION AND MORALITY IN THE *FOLLETINES* AND *NOVELAS POR ENTREGA***

### **1.2.1 TIME IN *ASTUCIA: EL JEFE DE LOS HERMANOS DE LA HOJA O LOS CHARROS CONTRABANDISTAS DE LA RAMA***

Martín Barbero points out, as previously mentioned, that the division of the serials into short episodes and the openness of the content of the narrative with the inclusion of real events enabled the reader to perceive the time in the narratives as “real” time. He adds that the writer recreated in the short episodes the division of time in the everyday life of the reader, including the private space of the family. This, together with the inclusion of real events, helped the individual to relate his/her family life to the external life outside this institution. For Martín Barbero with the development of capitalism, which transforms and commercializes the everyday life of the individual, time is divided and commercialized into public time, dedicated mainly to the workplace, and private time

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 417-18.

<sup>33</sup>Martín Barbero, *Communication*, p. 230.



for leisure. According to Martín Barbero even primary family relationships are changed: the family is emptied from its productive role and separated from the public space and it is pushed to the private space, the limits of the house now become the space of the “individualismo consumista”.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, for the “clases populares”, when they become part of the masses, the way they relate their experience of time in everyday life to the time of external events - the “time of the nation”, and the “time of the world” - is through events in their own family. For example “the time my uncle died is when the war started”.<sup>35</sup> For Martín Barbero the time of the family is a mediation, a vehicle, that makes possible the communication between the private and public time. Thus, the individual’s sense of participation and belonging to a community is provided by popular culture, in which “la familia aparece como la gran mediación a través de la cual se vive la socialidad, esto es, la presencia ineludible y constante de la colectividad en la vida.”<sup>36</sup>

The *comedias rancheras* took up and reinvented some of the images of the family provided by melodrama in previous popular forms such as serials and popular theatre. The narrative of the *rancheras*, like the narrative of the *folletines*, centres on the family: the parental family and then the conjugal family. The parental family of the main character, the *charro*, is usually affected by the violence of the society surrounding him. He is an orphan or his parents die in suspicious circumstances. His ideal is to avenge the wrongs done to this family and then have a family of his own. Like the *folletines* most of the films end with a wedding, weddings being one of the few melodramatic vestiges in urban societies, where the duration and the rhythm of time is punctuated by events related to the family. It is a ritual of continuity in which family history is retold. Thus, family history can be linked in the narrative with the upheaval in the individual’s everyday life and Mexico’s continuous internal struggles in the formation of the nation-state.

This can be seen in Inclán’s *Astucia*. As the title suggests, the group of *charros* have based their relationship and trust not on any social contract but on the family. The title also introduces the main character: Astucia, the head of the brotherhood, as a sort of father-figure whom they can trust. The everyday life of the *charros* is linked to the chaotic post-Independence period of almost permanent civil war during the formation of the nation-state, which some historians have called the era of Santa Anna (1821-1854):

In a brief period of 33 years, from 1821 to 1854, there was an empire,

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<sup>34</sup>Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Procesos de comunicación y matrices de cultura: itinerario para salir de la razón dualista* (Cali: Felafacs, 1987), p. 118.

<sup>35</sup>Idem

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-19.



five Constitutions were drawn up, two federal and two centralized political systems were established, two foreign wars were fought, in the second of which the country lost half its territory, and in the last years of this period, Antonio López de Santa Anna, with the support of the conservatives, set up a dictatorship.<sup>37</sup>

The everyday life of the *charro* and his family is set within the political vacuum which left rural communities especially prey to the whims of the local *caciques*. In addition, there was the constant threat of uprisings by a military class which emerged after the Independence of 1821. There were also marauding gangs of bandits.

The *charro* is portrayed as the true Mexican who has actively participated in the struggles leading to the formation of the country as a nation. His position outside the law is presented as a result of the breakdown of political and social institutions, not of his own criminality. The theme of the narrative is the hope for peace of a community affected by the chaos of civil unrest. This peace can only be achieved by a strong leader who, as a father figure, commands loyalty from his followers. The reproduction of the structure of the family as a social institution is presented as the ideal social structure which can protect the community from the corrupt authorities and the threat of the bandits.

In *Astucia* the main character Lorenzo Cabello (Astucia), is a *charro*, the son of a *ranchero*, forced by economic circumstances to leave his home to seek his fortune. He tries to make a living as an *aguardentero* (seller of *aguardiente*, cheap alcohol) but is thwarted by the corrupt local municipal authorities. In order to survive, he resorts to joining a band of tobacco smugglers. Showing the influence of the *Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas, the structure of the gang resembles that of a family: they all swear to be brothers: “Todos para uno, uno para todos”. However, the brotherhood differs from that in the Dumas story. In Inclán the structure of the brotherhood is extended to the families of the main members of the band and also the families of the network of poorer families who worked for them as various types of spies (“*galgos*”, “*espejos*”). These families help them to escape the constant pursuit of the central and local government forces, and the attacks of other gangs of bandits eager to oust them. This extended family, with its network of relationships, is regarded as the paradigm of the ideal social institution which can protect its members from injustice and persecution.

The members of the band are all *charros* who changed from citizens to outlaws as a

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<sup>37</sup>Stella M. González and Carmen G. Blázquez, *History of Mexico* (México: Panorama, 1993), p. 81.



result of the persecution of corrupt local *caciques* and the weakness of social institutions. Inclán, himself a *charro*, tells us that in the Haciendas de Púcuaro (in the state of Michoacán) he met the real-life *charro* who inspired him to write this serial; they were good friends and worked together until 1836 when their paths diverged, until they met again in 1863. The writer in his introduction states that he does not glamorize the illegal way in which the tobacco smugglers earned their living and disapproves of their earning a living this way. Nevertheless, he adds immediately that those *rancheros* were not “ladrones y bandidos”, a constant point he makes throughout the narrative. They had all been *rancheros* who were forced to become tobacco smugglers and hence outlaws. He adds that, on the contrary, they “perseguián de muerte y colgaban cuanto bandolero encontraban en camino”. He emphasizes that the *charros* with their natural virtues represent the true character of the Mexican.<sup>38</sup>

In this narrative, Inclán does not take sides between the parties involved in the ongoing civil war: the Conservatives with their support for the French invasion and the Maximilian Empire, or the Republicans led by Benito Juárez. Inclán avoids any comments on the French invasion. However, it is through the effects of the wars on the family and its members that he comments critically on the political and legal system in general. He shows that the line between legality and illegality is very thin, and how these definitions change according to the group in power. The local and central governments suffering from corruption and lack of economic resources are unable or unwilling to control bandits and sometimes they employ ex-bandits to capture bandits. In Inclán's work, the writer shows the corruption in the government when *los charros contrabandistas* are ambushed by the local government forces, and apart from their leader *Astucia el Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja* (Lorenzo Cabello) and two other members of the band, the whole group are either shot or hanged without trial. *Astucia* is lucky enough to survive the massacre of his friends, and by chance escapes hanging but later ends up in prison.

Inclán portrays the *charros contrabandistas* as “patriots” who supplied the tobacco which The Spanish Crown, with its high taxes, had made a luxury product which only the rich could afford. Through the character of *Astucia*, he argues that this law was not valid because the country was now independent from Spain and the law had been instituted by the Spanish Crown. The tobacco smugglers did not steal, he says, they broke the state monopoly of this industry and then sold the tobacco leaves cheaply to the poor peasants who could resell them and make a living. Nonetheless, there is also a criticism of the failure of the Republic and the liberals to fulfil their promises to take care of and improve the life of the population: “y en cuello nos dicen nuestros representantes que somos libres, que nuestra nación es república, que todo el mundo es

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<sup>38</sup>Inclán, (1966), p. 3.



ciudadano, que ya no hay tiranos, y otra porción de cosas muy contradictorias á la realidad”.<sup>39</sup>

The author, through Astucia, the main character, exposes the corruption of government institutions: in a clash with government troops the *charros* are defeated and robbed of their mules, horses and merchandise and even of their clothes and the clothes of the dead and all the wives and children are left without any means of survival. The inheritance of the victims should have been the *charro* costumes whose silver studs, leather boots, hats and guns represented wealth and also status, but these have been stolen. Inclán suggests in this narrative, that because the agents of the state are corrupt there is a need for a kind of support system based on family. This is exemplified when Astucia takes the role of head of his own family and the families of all the widows, children and relatives of the dead smugglers. The Liberals who formed the administration after the defeat of the Conservatives had promised a pension to all their supporters. Astucia was disappointed not to receive a pension from the Liberals, and yet felt responsible for the fate of his “extended family”. The family in this narrative is not only a small unit of personal relationships, which enables the individual to feel less alone, but the ideal social institution which could take care of the life in the community. In the end, Astucia, the strong leader -not the government- arranges to take care of his own family and what he calls his extended family: the widows and children of his “brothers”. The *caudillo* is seen as a father figure, taking care of the people in his region.

### 1.2.2 RECOGNITION AND MORALITY IN *LOS BANDIDOS DE RIO FRIO*

The other two characteristics of melodrama are recognition and morality. Recognition in melodrama works in different ways. One way, as was suggested in the previous section, is when the reader identifies with the characters, and recognizes his/her own life in the narrative. In this case the hero or heroine is not a remote figure but someone credible, with just a few invented features with which the reader can identify. A second form of recognition is when the reader/spectator recognizes the “true identity” of the characters, for example the long-lost parents of the hero; he recognizes that the two rivals are really father and son. These two forms of recognition work simultaneously in the relationship between writer and reader. In this way the reader actively participates in the narrative. This allows the writer to include a series of sub-plots which introduce and narrate the adventures of each of the main and secondary characters who cross each

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<sup>39</sup>Luis G. Inclán, *Astucia: El Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o Los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama: novela histórica de costumbres mexicanas con episodios originales*, 2 vols (México: Casa Viuda Bouret, 1908), II, p. 234.



other's paths without realizing the relationship between them. The climax is achieved when the characters recognize each other's true identities. In many cases, this recognition is of some unknown family tie: the father recognizes his long-lost son; the mother recognizes her lost lover, the father of her son. The reader has been aware of these relationships from the outset, therefore he has been an active participant in the narrative. This second form of recognition which leads to suspense and maintains the reader's interest in the plot will be studied in this section.

Recognition is closely linked to morality: this makes it possible to conclude the serial with the punishment of the "evil" characters, usually by death, and the rewarding of the "good" by future happiness. Morality neatly ties up the various loose ends and connects the disparate themes: revenge, retribution, love and justice. The extreme contrast between "good" and "evil" makes the reader take sides. However, morality is relative to the context of the narrative, when examined on a deeper level the "good" characters have flaws, for example they sometimes kill to avenge the murder of a loved one; and the "bad" characters can have some justification for their behaviour.

These characteristics of melodrama can be traced to one of the best examples of the nineteenth century Mexican serials, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*. Payno, in the introduction, tells us that he based his story on the life and trial of colonel Juan Yáñez (Relumbrón in his narrative) and his accomplices, a gang of bandits. Yáñez was in charge of the army based in the town of Acatlán, later he became Major in the city of Puebla and assistant to President Santa Anna. He led a double life and, using his position in the government, became the head of a gang of bandits. After a trial well-publicized in the newspapers, Yáñez was sentenced to be hanged. Unlike the version in the book where he is given a public execution, Yáñez killed himself with a knife-blade in his cell in the building formerly occupied by the Inquisition, on the 13th of July, 1839.<sup>40</sup>

Through his characters Payno makes the reader participate in the narrative by setting the story in familiar places in Mexico City and its surroundings which, with some changes, can still be located now: the centre of Mexico City with its canal of San Lázaro and the central city market, the old colonial palaces for the rich and the colonial buildings with their poor *vecindades*; the outskirts of the city with San Angel, the area where the rich spent their weekends and Río Frío en route to the port of Veracruz, gateway to Europe. The writer also set the stories on *ranchos* and in the famous commercial rural fairs of the nineteenth century. These fairs, often religious in origin, combined elements of the popular festival and commercial market place. The reader was familiar with these fairs

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<sup>40</sup>However, the writer covers a wider period of time in his narrative. He bases his story on real people whom the reader of the time would have been able to identify.



where people from different regions met and exchanged their music and dances.

Payno began his narrative using a structure with which the reader was familiar - the sensational style of reporting news in the press. The author attracts the reader's attention by beginning the serial with an article, which the narrator avers appeared in a newspaper, concerning a woman living in the outskirts of Mexico City who was pregnant for more than nine months. With the sensational story the writer establishes an interactive relationship between himself and the reader which allows him to introduce his characters and one of the plots and themes. This will create suspense, and the subsequent introduction of still more characters and sub-plots will enable the reader's mind to complete the jigsaw of the narratives. In Payno's narrative, the use of this news item adds "authenticity" to his story and motivates the reader by its familiarity.

There are two main plots interwoven with several sub-plots. The first part of the serial deals with one of the main plots: the Count of Sauz's refusal to let his daughter, Mariana, the Countess of Sauz, marry - beneath her station - her true love, the *charro* Juan Robreño, who is banished from the Count's properties in Mexico City and his *hacienda* in the countryside. The birth of their secret illegitimate child, named after his father Juan Robreño, and the child's subsequent disappearance from the people who were hiding and taking care of him lead the reader on to several of his misadventures and his meeting with the evil Evaristo who is the link with the second plot. Half-way through the story, a second main plot is introduced with the story of Evaristo, the leader of the bandits, and his encounter with "Relumbrón" a high ranking civil servant, married to a member of one of the leading families in the city; he is also the master-mind behind the gang of bandits. In the end the two main plots and the various sub-plots are resolved with Mariana marrying her true love, Juan Robreño. After revealing his true identity, Mariana's long lost son, is reunited with his parents. There follows the unmasking of Relumbrón's double life as a respectable member of society and as the brains behind the bandits who terrorize the stage-coaches, and who finally dare to rob the house of the Count and murder his servants. Relumbrón, Evaristo and the bandits are finally captured, tried and executed. Justice has been done.

This narrative follows some of the conventions of characterisation of the serials: Mariana, the Countess of Sauz is the acquiescent, dutiful daughter who endures her father's coldness and impositions without protest. She suffers in silence the loss of her lover, Juan Robreño. However, Payno breaks with some of the conventions of the serials; the heroine is not "pure" but gives birth to an illegitimate child in secret. Yet the "purity" of the heroine is not questioned in the narrative. Her fault is justified by her suffering at the hands of her father, the loss of her lover and the loss of her child, his subsequent disappearance and her quest to find him. Suspense will be maintained by the



reader's knowledge of the true identity of the child and his various adventures that many times take him so close to his mother, without ever crossing her path. However, the reader knows the true identity of the child, is witness to the closeness of their encounters and their lack of recognition.

Mariana's father, the Count of Sauz, is the stereotype of the wicked character in the melodrama, with his handle-bar moustache and black clothes. He is a two-dimensional character who married his wife for money and after her early death was a cold father to his daughter Mariana. The description of the character is wooden and scarcely credible but it helps the development of the plot. Payno presents the Count as a Spanish aristocrat who is still loyal to Spain and does not accept an independent Mexico, creating a recognizable character, the Spanish dweller in Mexico, which will be developed in many Mexican narratives, popular theatre and the cinema.

The bandit Evaristo is a murderer who kills his wife, an ex-servant of Mariana, and almost kills the boy (Mariana's son). This is the evil character who deceives, robs, murders and almost escapes punishment. Evaristo is also the tool of the government's dishonesty represented by the cynical Relumbrón, the man behind an organized web of crime: the raids on the *diligencias*, the bribery among the government troops, and the series of robberies of the rich. Both characters represent evil: Evaristo the bandit and Relumbrón the schemer, both deceive and commit the ultimate sin, murder. With these characters the writer is able to introduce his comments on the uncertainties of a fragile political system, with the widespread corruption of the post Independence period. Relumbrón is an assistant to the President (there are hints that this is Santa Anna). However, the writer is able to counterbalance the comments on the malpractice in the political system with the symbol of justice, the recently retired lawyer, Pedro Martín de Olañeta, who knows the truth and patiently, with the reader, collects evidence to unmask the traitor and the bandits. The reader waits from one episode to the next for the discovery of their wickedness and their punishment. Finally both villains are tried and sentenced to death. Relumbrón is recognized by his mother just as he is about to be hanged. The reader, in complicity with the writer from the outset, knew his real background and the truth about his parents. Payno's description of Relumbrón is ambivalent. On the one hand, he justifies the behaviour of Relumbrón by making him a man who believes himself to be an orphan. On the other hand, he represents the "nouveau riche" who is driven by envy and ambition. While the first plot is re-solved by Mariana's discovery of her family, the second plot concludes with Relumbrón's mother recognizing her son as he is about to die. The reader know very little about her, apart from her relative wealth in the countryside and her desire to have a child with the businessman she visits in the city.



There are many other types who appear in later narratives and were taken up by the popular theatre and the cinema. One of them is Cecilia, the fruit seller who is portrayed as the *ranchera*, stereotypically strong, independent and down-to-earth. The description of her clothes in this serial is detailed and is very similar to that of the country women of the period mentioned in Guillermo Prieto's memoirs: long frilly cotton skirts, coloured necklaces and "rebozos" (shawls). These were the clothes that the *rancheras* singers adopted as the generalized image of the "true" woman of the people. Cecilia's character is opposed to the Countess of Sauz: in a subtle way the writer portrays Cecilia as the "real" Mexican, whose strength and courage allow her to survive the evil Evaristo. The Countess on the other hand is weak.

Through Lamparilla, a shady lawyer who with his partner Bedolla has made his way up the ladder by corrupt means, Payno deals with the theme of justice and the need to eradicate the corruption in the bureaucracy of the country, especially rife in Mexico City. With wit and irony, Payno describes how out of sheer spite, Lamparilla and Bedolla plot to send a series of forged letters to set state governors against each other and the President, which almost resulted in a Revolution. The writer, in complicity with the reader, knows about their mischief. Each state governor reads about someone else betraying him, while the Presidents fears an uprising. Here Payno makes the reader participate in the mischief and at the same time introduces the fear of some intellectuals and politicians in the real politically arena of the period of the dangers of dividing a political united country into a federation, giving power to state governors. This period in Mexican history was marked by frequent uprisings led by governors of wealthy states against the central government. Payno sees the funny side of this and makes the Minister of the Interior say that if the rebellions are not controlled the country and the power of the President would be reduced to Mexico City: "y si así seguimos, nos vamos a quedar reducidos al Distrito Federal. El país se disuelve...".<sup>41</sup> The story includes various elements of popular culture, among them sayings which were later included in the *rancheras*. The Minister goes on to say to the President:

Puebla, Jalisco y Sinaloa, han sido siempre Estados que han dado muchos dolores a los presidentes de la República. El uno con sus granaderos y sus valientes tejedores del barrio del Alto y el otro con su refrán guerrero y popular de: *Jalisco nunca pierde*".<sup>42</sup>

In the end the reader, who has known the truth all the time, is reassured by the discovery

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<sup>41</sup>Payno, p. 320.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 417.



of the culprits. With the help of the President, a revolution is averted, justice is done and the judicial system is now free of corruption. While in Astucia the *Caudillo* is presented as the father figure, in this narrative the President represents the strong head of the family, a symbol of justice whose family is the nation.

*Los Bandidos de Río Frío* ends with a family reunited and the prospect of future happiness through marriage. Justice is restored. The wicked are punished and the good are rewarded, emphasizing recognition and morality. The dramatic structure of the melodrama, influenced by the oral narrative, polarizes the characters into good and evil. In a schematic form the characters appear with no psychological depth and are punished or rewarded according to their deserts. The conclusion occurs through the revelation of the characters' true identities and the re-establishment of family ties. Thus, morality is expressed through the language of sentimentality and excess, closely resembling the oral narrative. The ritual of marriage brings continuity and hope for the future. Nevertheless, at the end the writer and the reader recognize each other as accomplices: it is all make-believe. These stories were taken up by the radio in the *radionovelas*. Additionally, the cinema exploited the various elements of melodrama contained in these stories and re-created them in a style more appropriate to the new medium. The narrative of the *comedias rancheras* absorbed these characteristics of the melodrama. The oral quality of the serials was adopted in the films, with recognition and morality encouraging the participation of the audience. The *charro* and his family represent continuity; he is a mediation between the public's rural memory and the images produced by the media.

## CHAPTER 2. THE *CHARRO* AS *PERSONA* AND *PERSONAJE*

In the *comedias rancheras*, the main character, the *charro*, is recognizable by his visual image: his *sombrero* and the silver-decorated clothes which express his wealth. He commands respect in the community through his horsemanship. However, this character has some flaws: he is a braggart, boasting of his valour and is usually on the fringes of the law. These characteristics can be traced back to the melodrama of the nineteenth century serials which features tales of real bandits such as the tobacco smugglers and Los plateados. At the same time ballads appeared, the *corridos* which told the stories of bandits, bullfighters and other popular heroes. Often these ballads were about *valientes*, mock-heroic caricatures, who boasted of imagined valour. In this chapter, I intend to trace these characteristics of the *charro cantor* back to the nineteenth century serials and *corridos*.

### 2.1 THE *CHARRO* AS BANDIT IN THE *FOLLETINES* AND *NOVELAS POR ENTREGA*

One of the characteristics of the serials was the inclusion of real events and people with whom the reader was familiar.<sup>1</sup> The Mexican serials of the nineteenth century took the image of the rural dweller, the *charro*, as one of the main characters. The stories were usually set in the past. Therefore, the reader, it would seem, tended to regard the stories of the past with a feeling of nostalgia. For the city dweller Mexico was changing very quickly and the rural world was idealized. It is difficult to know the extent of internal migration in the nineteenth century because official statistics only began to be recorded in 1895. However, nineteenth century writers such as Guillermo Prieto and Luis González Obregón in their accounts of Mexico City mention its growth and its changes. Furthermore, from 1888 the building of the railways facilitated internal migration. By the beginning of the twentieth century half of the residents in the City came from other states, and also from nearby areas such as Tacuba, Tacubaya and Mixcoac (now part of Mexico City).<sup>2</sup> In his memoirs, (published in 1906), Guillermo Prieto described with pride the *charros* of his youth in the early 1830's: "vestidos los jinetes de charros: sombrero galoneado, pantalonera con botonadura de maciza plata, silla vaquera, con argentíferos adornos en la cabeza y en el arzón."<sup>3</sup> He also described the *ranchera*, the female rural dweller with her distinctive costume of *China Poblana*, now the female national costume, which was taken up by the female *ranchera* singers:

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<sup>1</sup>Jesús Martín Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations* (London: Sage, 1993), pp. 129-28.

<sup>2</sup>*El Universal*, 'Muy cerca de un millón de habitantes en la ciudad', 21 May 1930, p. 8

<sup>3</sup>Guillermo Prieto, *Memorias de mis tiempos*, 2nd edn (México: Porrúa, 1996), pp. 127-28.



“salerosa, de enaguas rojas de castor y verde rebozo de seda, la camisa escotada e hilos de perlas y corales sobre la piel de su pecho apiñonado.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the characteristics of the *charros* was the distinctiveness of their clothes, which contrasted with those of the *peones*, the poorer labourers who could only afford rough white cotton garments. There are various versions of the origins of the *charro*. Some sources say their clothes were influenced by the rural dwellers from Salamanca, others add that the influence came from the horsemen of Navarra and Andalucía.<sup>5</sup> After the conquest, the horse was introduced into New Spain. A breed of horse more suitable to the new terrain was developed; a distinctive style of riding arose, which was a mixture of Spanish and indigenous techniques. Indigenous peoples developed a new style of taming young horses. The saddles and harness were modified to suit local conditions. New strains of cattle were developed, especially in the North of Mexico, requiring specific skills. This new situation stimulated the development of distinct skills which brought acclaim to the Mexican horsemen.<sup>6</sup> In the middle of the sixteenth century the *hacienda* system was developed in order to feed the population, and new areas were settled.<sup>7</sup>

The *charrería* began to develop as an opportunity for *hacendados* and *rancheros* to demonstrate their skills in horsemanship; it was also a get-together for neighbours to participate in equestrian competitions, feasting, music dance and religious ritual—in short, a *fiesta (charreada)*.<sup>8</sup> Distinct from the Spanish bullfighting, *charrería* began to develop as a Mexican practice with emphasis on the costume and the mastery of horsemanship and roping skills.<sup>9</sup> In the nineteenth century the term *charro* was used in Mexico to describe the *rancheros*, the rural dwellers who possessed great skills of horsemanship and various skills related to round-ups: lassoing and *colas* (tailing bulls) and who wore distinctive clothes. They were *hacendados* or from the rural middle social strata: administrators of *haciendas*, *herrerados*, *tusaderos* and small-holders, or *medieros*—sharecroppers who rented land from the *hacendado* and paid with part of their produce. To become a *charro* was also a means of social advancement for the

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<sup>4</sup> Idem

<sup>5</sup> Anon. *Enciclopedia de México*, 7 vols (México: Instituto de la Enciclopedia de México, 1967), II, p. 1207.

<sup>6</sup> In Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha* the skills in horsemanship of the Mexican riders are already recognized. In an episode in which Don Quijote and Sancho meet *Dulcinea* for the first time, she escapes the Don's amorous pursuit by skilfully mounting a donkey, at which Sancho explains: “¡Vive Roque, que es la señora nuestra ama más ligera que un acotán, y que puede enseñar a subir a la jineta al más diestro cordobés o mejicano!”. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo, Don Quijote de la Mancha*, 2nd edn (London: Harrap, 1950), p. 632.

<sup>7</sup> Leovigildo Islas Escárcega, ‘Síntesis histórica de la charrería’, *Artes de Mexico*, 99 (1967), pp. 13-19 (p.14).

<sup>8</sup> Michael S. Werner, ed. *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society and Culture*, 2 vols (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), I, p. 238.

<sup>9</sup> Islas Escárcega, p. 14.



poorer workers. In addition, their skills could be readily turned to military purposes, so that they could be recruited either in the “service of the nation” or by revolutionary movements. Furthermore, in a country beset by constant Civil Wars and foreign invasions, the *charros* were particularly vulnerable to the loss of their land or their jobs in the ranches and *haciendas*; thus many were obliged to live outside the law.

Not all the *charros* were bandits but the memory of the image of the *charros* as bandit or outlaw was perpetuated in the popular imagination in paintings, the *novelas por entrega* and the *corridos* of the nineteenth century. After the country’s independence, various painters began a strong nationalistic movement to represent what was “Mexican”. One of the artists of this period, J.M. Rugendas painted a romanticized image of the highway robber in his picture *The Stage-coach Bandit* in which the robber is dressed as a *charro* or *chinaco*, with his *sombrero de ala*, short jacket and chaps decorated with silver studs. This painting is in vivid colours. The focus of the painting is the powerful, elegant horse against the background of the Mexican terrain, the face of the rider is turned away from the viewer directing our attention to his costume, a contrast with the unromanticized dark Goya paintings of bandits whose faces represent death.

In *Astucia* and *Los bandidos*, the *charros* are represented in their role of bandits. However they are not just thieves but social bandits: the system has forced them to live outside the law. According to Hobsbawm there are two types of bandits, those belonging to the professional underworld, and the social bandits. These are the type of bandits depicted in the *folletines*: “They are the peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported”.<sup>10</sup> This thin line between law and banditry was picked up in the *folletines* and the *corridos*; later on, the cinema also re-created these images. The *charro* in the *comedias rancheras* is portrayed as a man on the fringes of society due to the machinations of the local *caudillo*. A further analysis will follow in the study of the films selected.

In the narratives we are dealing with there are two groups of real nineteenth century bandits which are depicted: the *charros contrabandistas* and *Los plateados*. Inclán based his narrative on the *charros contrabandistas de la rama* (tobacco smugglers), while Altamirano was inspired by a group of bandits known as *Los plateados* because of the extravagant use of silver ornaments in their clothes. In the narrative of *Astucia*, the main character is Lorenzo Cabello, (*Astucia*) and his band of *charros*, smugglers of tobacco. *Los plateados* made an appearance but only as secondary characters who are

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<sup>10</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Trinity, 1969), p. 13.







not glamorized, perhaps because these people were still perceived as a threat; it was only when the danger of actual bandits had receded that they were romanticized and regarded with nostalgia. Inclán based the main character Lorenzo Cabello (*Astucia*) on a *charro* he had known in his youth. Through this character, Inclán describes in detail the different rural skills of the *charro*. He repeated this information from one of his earlier pamphlets called: *Reglas con que un colegial pueda colear y lazar* which he wrote based on his own practical knowledge and experience. He published it in his own printing house just before he printed *Astucia*.

Apart from their skills, the *charros'* clothes were what gave them the image of freedom, self-assertion and individuality, which fitted well with the melodrama of the *folletines*. Their clothes were also a sign of power: "The rural tough's outfit is a code which reads: 'This man is not tame' ".<sup>11</sup> Together with their clothes there were other symbols of a refusal to submit, their swagger, their carrying of arms, sticks or clubs: "The *vaquero* outfit of the Mexican herd-riders which has become the classic cowboy costume of the Westerns, and the more or less equivalent styles of *gauchos* and *llaneros* on the South American plains".<sup>12</sup> In *Astucia*, there are various examples of the importance of clothes used to impose authority. *Astucia*, the leader of the *charros contrabandistas*, was advised by Pepe, his right hand man, to dress in expensive *charro* clothes, to ride an expensive horse and to carry a gun to impress and impose his authority not only on the secondary members of his band but on their enemies, other bandits and the government's army.

This serial also re-created from real life the atmosphere of the country fairs. These were national events that apart from their commercial purpose were places where people found entertainment and the opportunity to socialize. People from different regions could mingle, but they also provided a opportunities for outlaws elements could demonstrate their power and status. In *Astucia*, the atmosphere of the fairs is described with examples of the way power has to be outwardly expressed. The silver in the *charro* costume represents a sort of bravado, 'wearing your wealth on your back'. In a rural culture the horses also represented wealth and the better the horse and their ornaments the higher the status of the owner and his chances of success. This power gained respect and provoked fear in a rural world in which riding skills were essential not only to travel from one place to another but for survival. The first meeting of *Astucia* and Don Polo, the head of another rival group *Los plateados* occurs in a country fair. *Astucia* gains the respect of Don Polo and his group of bandits through his physical strength when the latter challenges him to arm wrestling and loses. *Astucia*, the new comer, is

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>12</sup>Idem



then recognized as a worthy opponent. He also demonstrates his skills *con la riata*, *coleando* and his *astucia* (cunning) in the *palenques*, and the result is that both groups agree to respect each other's territory and to offer help when necessary against the authority of the local army.

In the second half of the nineteenth century some of the vivid images of the *charro* with their suits heavy with silver studs come from the popular culture which developed around the band of *Los plateados*. They were a group of bandits who joined the Republican Army as irregular soldiers and fought on the side of the *Liberals* and President Benito Juárez during the French intervention and the Maximilian Empire (1864-67). After the end of the French intervention, *Los plateados*, groups of *guerrillas* and ordinary bandits, took advantage of a political vacuum and terrorized towns and travellers. They all robbed on the highways and held to ransom the towns and their inhabitants. In his memoirs García Cubas states that:

Las guerrillas de Paulino Noriega y Catarino Fragoso, así como las cuadrillas de Plateados, mantenían en continua alarma a los pueblos de la parte Septentrional del Valle de México y especialmente a los de Zinguilucan y Tulancingo, como que era la época en que iba enturbiándose más y más el horizonte político del Imperio.<sup>13</sup>

The *plateados* are an example of how in a rural culture, clothes were used as part of a type of counter-culture which challenged the conventions of the period. Their ostentatious clothes were seen as vulgar by the city dwellers who were influenced by the largely French-dominated European fashion of the day. This was part of their strategy to challenge society and inspire fear. The following is a description of García Cubas of his encounter with a member of *Los plateados*:

Volví el rostro y mis ojos vieron, cerca de mí, a un jinete, y en las lejanas lomas, la fuerza de caballería de la que aquél se había desprendido. Su traje de cuero con vivos de plata y el sombrero galoneado, de tres pedradas, o sea apabullado en tres puntos de su elevada copa, hiciéronme comprender que tenía que habérmelas con los plateados, muy temidos como ladrones y plagiarios.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Antonio García Cubas, *El libro de mis recuerdos*, 7th edn (México: Patria, 1978), p. 667.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 668.

Years later, the writer Ignacio M. Altamirano took up the popular story of *Los plateados* as the central theme of *El Zarco*. His leader El Zarco was the main character in his story. The writer's intention was to oppose the bandit, a white man, against the good man, Manuel *un mestizo*. However, he continued to preserve in popular culture the image of los *charros* and *Los plateados* with his detailed description of their clothes and their horses. Although Altamirano intended to make a distinction between good and bad characters, in practice this is not so clear cut because the narrative *Los plateados* sided with Benito Juárez and the liberals against the conservatives and the French troops. These *charros*, although bandits, began to be seen as the representatives of the Mexicans against the foreign invaders and their followers, usually the city dwellers. By this time the *charro* costume already represented the symbol of national identity, the Mexican. Even Maximilian in his attempt to gain the favour of the people wore *charro* clothes.<sup>15</sup>

In the narrative, Altamirano's careful description of the *charro* costume of *El Zarco* gives him a mythical aura:

Estaba vestido como los bandidos de esa época, y como nuestros charros, los más charros de hoy. Llevaba chaqueta de paño oscuro con bordados de plata, calzoneras con doble hilera de chapetones de plata, unidos por cadenillas y agujetas del mismo metal; cubríase con un sombrero de lana oscura, de alas grandes y tendidas, y que tenían tanto encima como debajo de ellas una ancha y espesa cinta de galón de plata bordada con estrellas de otro; rodeada la copa redonda y achatada una doble toquilla de plata, sobre la cual caían a cada lado dos chapetas también de plata, en forma de bulas rematando en anillos de oro.<sup>16</sup>

The horse, which the indigenous people had seen for the first time with terror and of which the conquistador Hernán Cortés took advantage to frighten them, was now a feature of the landscape, with its association with Mexican rural culture. In the narrative of *El Zarco*, the bandit's type of horse, with the silver ornaments in the saddle also indicates power and status in a rural culture:

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<sup>15</sup>H. Montgomery Hide, *Mexican Empire: the History of Maximilian and Carlota in Mexico* (London: McMillan, 1946), pp.166-67.

<sup>16</sup>Ignacio M. Altamirano, *El Zarco y La navidad en las montañas* (México: Porrúa, 1967), p. 16.



El caballo que montaba era un soberbio alazán, de buena alzada, musculoso, de encuentro robusto, de pezuñas pequeñas, de ancas poderosas como todos los caballos montañeses ... La silla que montaba estaba bordada profusamente de plata; la cabeza grande era una masa de ese metal, lo mismo que la teja y los estribos, y el freno del caballo estaba lleno de chapetes, de estrellas y de figuras caprichosas.<sup>17</sup>

In this rural culture guns were also a status symbol which denoted power and commanded respect: “en el cinturón un par de pistolas de empuñadura de marfil, en sus fundas de charol negro bordadas de plata.”<sup>18</sup> Altamirano, using the voice of the narrator, called this ostentatious display of wealth vulgar: “Era una ostentación insolente, cínica y sin gusto”.<sup>19</sup> However, the writer’s negative opinions are diluted by the detailed description of *El Zarco*, his clothes creating for the reader a fascinating image of a ghostly silvery rider shining under the moon: a sense of nostalgia for a rural world which is rapidly disappearing.

In *Los de abajo*, Mariano Azuela did not try to create a revolutionary epic as other writers of the period had done. Thus, this narrative explores a rural world in which most of the members of the band led by Demetrio Macías were *campesinos* who joined the Revolution not from an awareness of the political effect of this movement in the country but because of the impact of the local situation in their everyday life. Many of them had become outlaws as a result of the injustices and personal rivalries with the local *cacique*. Azuela uses the clothes of his characters to represent their change of moral stance. When Macías is chased by the government troops of usurper Victoriano Huerta, he is wearing *manta* clothes -white cotton garments associated with the *campesinos* - “Alto, robusto, de faz bermeja, sin pelo de barba, vestía camisa y calzón de manta, ancho sombrero de soyate y guaraches”.<sup>20</sup> Once he joins the revolutionary troops and turns a blind eye to Luis Cervantes’ corruption, his costume changes to “sombrero galoneado, pantalón de gamuza con botonadura de plata y chamarra bordada de hilo de oro”.<sup>21</sup> The rest of the *campesinos* dream and hear with awe the tales of the luxury of the clothes of *Los Dorados* de Villa. Their name itself conjures up gold and brings back the memory of *Los plateados* with their silvery clothes. It also illustrates the fact that in a country of social unrest the line between the *ranchero/charro* and the bandit was very thin. Men were usually vulnerable to the abuses of the local authorities and the changes in the political system. Macías, like Pancho Villa, had started as an

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<sup>17</sup>Idem

<sup>18</sup>Idem

<sup>19</sup>Idem

<sup>20</sup>Mariano Azuela, *Los de abajo*, 8th edn (México: FCE, 1969), p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 90.



outlaw and later became a revolutionary.

The narrative of *Los de abajo* shows how the rural world was changing due to the influence of modernity and the introduction of technology. In a decisive battle the old rural world of fighting from horseback and using the skills of the rural countryside had to be adapted to a world of machine guns: “El caballo de Macías, cual si en vez de pesuñas hubiese tenido garras de águila, trepó sobre estos peñascos. ‘¡Arriba, arriba!’, gritaron sus hombres, siguiendo tras él, como venados, sobre las rocas, hombres y bestias hechos uno...Demetrio lazaba las ametralladoras, tirando de ellas cual si fuesen toros bravos”.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2 THE CHARRO IN THE CORRIDOS

In the repertoire of the *ranchero* singers there are various *corridos*, ranging from folk songs popular in the Revolution of 1910, to new *corridos* such as *Allá en el Rancho Grande* which was generally believed to be anonymous but was in fact written by Silvano Ramos in 1927, and *Juan Charrasqueado* sometimes classified as a folk song, but actually written by Joaquín Cordero (1942). In the narratives of the songs the *charro*, re-inforced by the narratives of the films, has certain characteristics: on the one hand, he is brave in the bullring, a good horseman, but at the same time closely associated with the image of a man on the fringes of the law. He gets into debt, he gambles and he takes the law into his own hands. He loves to show off his valour and *hombria*, but there is a tongue-in-cheek humour and an element of self mockery. These characteristics can be traced back to the narratives of various types of *corridos* which according to their themes have been classified by Vicente T. Mendoza, Gabriel Saldivar and Merle E. Simmons as *corridos* of bandits, bullfighters and *valientes*.

The *corridos* are narrative song based on real events, on a wide range of subjects taken from everyday life. The use of oral narrative such as popular spoken language, *refranes*, stock lines and dialogue, made their transition from popular culture to the mass media easy. It is believed that the origins of the *corridos* date back to the colonial period. Gabriel Saldivar and Vicente T. Mendoza agree that it is likely that the Spanish *romances*, especially those from southern Spain and particularly the regions of Extremadura and Andalucía, influenced the *corridos*.<sup>23</sup> Saldivar points out that it is possible that they were already sung in Mexico in the seventeenth century but the earliest *hojas sueltas* so far discovered date back to the eighteenth century. Unlike the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-73.

<sup>23</sup>Vicente T. Mendoza, *El corrido de la Revolución Mexicana* (México: UNAM, 1990), p. 9



Spanish romance, the narratives of this period had already established the so called 'classic' structure used in Mexico, which was later consolidated in the nineteenth century: "un saludo, o invitación, o llamada de atención al auditorio para que oigan el canto, y al finalizar una despedida que hace alusión a lo que se cantó."<sup>24</sup>

Saldívar also points out that the *corrido* could have been influenced by the *tocontín* (sometimes called *tocotín*) the Aztec type of narrative dealing with events of the day, which was adapted into Spanish and was sung in the Colegio de Santiago de Tlatelolco in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>25</sup> There exist examples of the *tocotín* left by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, written in Nahuatl, such as the *Tocotín por la Asunción*. There can be no specific date in which the name of *relación* or *romance* changed to *corrido*. Saldívar states that the name *corrido* came from the term used by the Inquisition "que corren con escándalo por la ciudad y reino" or "que corren en tal o cual parte". It is, he adds, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in which the *Diccionario de la Academia de la Lengua* officially defines the *corrido* as: "romance o jácara que se canta acompañándolo con la vihuela."<sup>26</sup>

The *corridos* continued to be sung in the various fairs by travelling singers. However, the nascent mass printing industry in the late nineteenth century increased the production of printed *corridos*. In 1880 Antonio Vanegas Arroyo began specializing in *hojas sueltas* of *romances*, *oraciones*, *adivinanzas* and *coplas corridos* in his printing house in Mexico City. His *hojas sueltas* had an engraving at the top, followed by a summary in prose of the events described and then the *corrido* (narrative in verse). These woodcuts were made by his chief illustrator José Guadalupe Posada who invented a new technique of engraving which made possible their mass production. At the turn of the twentieth century, in 1901, Eduardo Guerrero started to compete with Vanegas printing mainly *corridos* but also other popular songs and literature.<sup>27</sup> Although these two were the main printing houses, there were other minor printers in the city and the provinces. These houses provided the *corridistas* with their sheets, which they put on the market pavements to attract the attention of the passers-by. These printers also filled their stock by buying compositions from the *corridistas*. The *corridistas* did not always stay in the city but travelled from town to town and from fair to fair.

During the Díaz dictatorship, opera was favoured by the bourgeoisie and the *corrido*

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<sup>24</sup> Gabriel Saldívar, *Historia de la música* (México: SEP, 1987), p. 274.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>27</sup>Merle E. Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido as a Source for Interpretative Study of Modern Mexico: 1870-1950* (Indiana: Indiana University Publications, 1957), pp. 31-32.





*En el Puente Blanco*

2. Illustration of a *corrido* by José Guadalupe Posada.



and the *tonadilla* were for the “*clases bajas*”.<sup>28</sup> However, with the Revolution of 1910 and with the movement of soldiers, *soldaderas* (the women who fought in the Revolution) and *corridistas*, these songs experienced a revival. After the Revolution, the intellectuals and the government began to create a national culture in which they included *cultura popular*. The painter Diego Rivera saved from oblivion the engravings and paintings of José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) and included *corridos* in his articles defending the merits of *arte popular*. The government supported the work of two of the main musicologists of Mexican *música popular*, Gabriel Saldívar and Vicente T. Mendoza who rescued many of the *corridos* of this period. Popular theatre featured some *corridos*. With the development of the radio and the “talkies” old *corridos* were musically re-arranged and new compositions were written.

### 2.2.1 BANDITS

The image of the *charro* as a bandit in the *rancheras* can be traced back to the popular culture of the nineteenth century, particularly the narratives of the *corridos* of bandits. After the death of a bandit, many *hojas sueltas* appeared, narrating his life, deeds and the way he met his death. This made the bandits into heroes and their memory was kept alive in the popular imagination. Simmons mentions that one of the earliest *hoja suelta* that has been found dates from 1841. It narrates the death of Leandro Rivera a popular Mexican bandit of this period. Another well known *corrido* of the 1850s is about the Mexican bandit Joaquín Murieta (sic). He is said to have been in California during the gold rush days.<sup>29</sup> There are some doubts about the existence of this bandit. Hobsbawm points out that Joaquín Murieta never existed, but was a literary invention by a Cherokee Indian in which the character had various elements of the bandits: terror, cruelty but also ‘nobility’: “credible enough to have entered Californian folklore and even historiography.”<sup>30</sup> He adds that as a symbol of power and vengeance: “Joaquín Murieta was the avenger of the Californian Mexican against the conquering *gringos*, and was himself a Cherokee Indian.”<sup>31</sup>

The political turmoil of the nineteenth century created the conditions which led to banditry. The adventures of these outlaws provided material for the production of *corridos*. At the end of the century, various *corridos* were composed about two well known bandits of this period: Valentín Mancera (killed in 1882) and Heraclio Bernal (killed approximately 1888). The contents of these compositions have survived thanks

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<sup>28</sup>Carlos Monsiváis, ‘La agonía interminable de la canción romántica’, *Comunicación y Cultura*, 12 (1984), 21-40 (p. 21).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>30</sup>Hobsbawm, pp. 54-55.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 56.



to the preservation of the *hojas sueltas* printed in Vanegas Arroyo's press, some of them with engravings by Posada. The *hojas sueltas* had an illustration above the title and the lyrics of the *corridos*. This allowed the reader to identify with the character in the story.

Años de mil ochocientos  
ochenta y cinco al contado,  
murió Heraclio Bernal  
por el Gobierno pagado.

Estado de Sinaloa,  
Gobierno de Culiacán,  
ofrecieron diez mil pesos  
por la vida de Bernal.

La tragedia de Bernal  
en Guadalupe empezó,  
por unas barras de plata  
que dicen que se robó.

Heraclio Bernal gritaba  
que era un hombre y no se rajaba,  
que subiéndose a la sierra  
peleaba con la Acordaba.<sup>32</sup>

From this period also dates the image of Chucho el Roto, which has survived until the present day. The *corridos* narrating his life are unusually sung before the death of the hero.<sup>33</sup> Chucho el Roto is more the urban bandit, praised because he robbed the rich to help the poor:

Bandolero, bandolero,  
que tienes corazón  
más noble  
que el de un caballero.

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<sup>32</sup>Vicente T. Mendoza, *Corridos mexicanos* (México: FCE, 1992), p. 119.

<sup>33</sup>Simmons, p. 505. This writer took this *corrido* from Higinio Vázquez Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos* (Mexico: without printing house, 1925).



There is some dispute about the existence of this bandit who is said to have lived a double life as a rich man and as a thief, a kind of Mexican Raffles or Robin Hood. Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, in an article published in the newspaper as early as 1883, shows that this character was already part of the popular imagination in this period: “Los extranjeros se imaginarán que Chucho el Roto es un personaje permitido y que la policía está a la altura de los carabineros de Offenbach.”<sup>34</sup> Whatever his origins as man or legend, his story continued to be told years later and showed that he had become part of urban popular culture. By the early part of the twentieth century, cheap editions of his *corridos* in *hojas volantes* were still sold in the markets in Mexico City: “en los mercados, por un cobre se obtiene, en verso libre, la vida ejemplar de un bandolero honradísimo, ‘afusilado’, quien llegó a la muerte sin vendarse, con un puro de perilla en la boca y su traje de lujo.”<sup>35</sup> The popular theatre later took up this story and with the development of the cinema and the radio this character was revived.<sup>36</sup> Similar narratives were included in the *comedias rancheras*.

With the Revolution of 1910, the *corridos* dealt with the various events and protagonists of the struggle. Depending on the outcome of a battle a bandit could become a hero. The following is an example of a *corrido* narrating the beginning of this movement and welcoming Francisco I. Madero, the head of the opposition party against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and Pascual Orozco one of the first revolutionaries who joined him in the uprising:

En mil novecientos diez comienzan las profecías,  
se levantó la nación contra de Porfirio Díaz.  
En mil novecientos diez, día veinte de noviembre,  
el día en que empezó a pelear el que la patria defiende.

No le temo al Presidente, tampoco a Ramón Corral.  
El Santo Niño de Atocha es el que me ha de ayudar.

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<sup>34</sup>Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera: *artículos*, ed. by Rafael Pérez Gay (México: Cal y Arena, 1996), p. 81.

<sup>35</sup>Angel de Campo, *Pueblo y campo* (México: UNAM, 1991), p. 124. He wrote this article in March, 1905.

<sup>36</sup>Enrique de Olavarria y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro de México: 1538-1911*, prefaced and updated to 1961 by Salvador Novo, 5 vols (México: Porrúa, 1961), IV, p. 2953. In 1907, in the Teatro Hidalgo, the drama company of Felipe Montoya put on the drama *Chucho el Roto*. Emilio Carballido, *Tiempo de ladrones: La historia de Chucho el Roto* (México: Grijalbo, 1983), pp. 249-58. It has interesting information about the story of *Chucho el Roto*. The cinema recreated this story and there were various films. In 1934, Gabriel Soria directed the film *Chucho el Roto*. The comedian Tin-tan made a parody in his film *Chucho el Remendado* (dir. Gilberto Solares) in 1951. In the 1960s there was also a successful radio serial and later a television serial. In the 1980s Carballido wrote his play.



Anda, vuela palomita, anda, párate en el kiosko;  
anda, saluda a Madero, también a Pascual Orozco...<sup>37</sup>

This *corrido* celebrates the beginning of the Revolution and praises Madero and Orozco, regarded as rebels by the authorities. This *corrido* follows a traditional structure by establishing the date of the events. It uses stock phrases such as *El Niño de Atocha es el que me ha de ayudar* and it makes reference to a rural scenario with the *kiosko*, the band stand which are in most of Mexican rural towns.

### 2.2.2 BULLFIGHTERS

The images of two of the most famous Mexican bullfighters of the nineteenth century: Bernardo Gaviño and Ponciano Díaz were part of popular culture in the serials, popular theatre and the *corridos*. Bernardo Gaviño who had a long career from the early 1850's had various *corridos* written about him praising his skills and valour: "One, entitled Bernardo Gaviño, related in a most vivid and dramatic narrative the matador's last brave fight at Texcoco in 1886 and is one of the best of all *corridos* about bullfighters."<sup>38</sup> In the serial, *Astucia*, there is some indirect praise for Gaviño. The hero's skills in the bullring made the people mistake him for the bullfighter: "Mira, José Antonio, ya no te morirás con el deseo de ver torear a Gaviño, el célebre Bernardo Gaviño"<sup>39</sup> Another example of *corridos* to Gaviño is titled *A la memoria de Bernardo Gaviño*, this is a review of his career.

There are also *corridos* about Ponciano Díaz during the height of his career between 1880 and the early 1890's. His skills as a *charro* and a bullfighter made him a hero. Some examples of the numerous titles are: *Al intrépido lidiador mexicano Ponciano Díaz*, *Recuerdos a México de Ponciano Díaz desde España*, *Adiós a Madrid del valiente espada Ponciano Díaz*.<sup>40</sup> His death in 1899 inspired the composition of various *corridos*. In Chapter 3, in the section on popular theatre, I intend to analyse the way in which this character featured in many *zarzuelas*, and the *revistas* that were written about him. Later, the cinema also took up his story.

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<sup>37</sup>Mendoza, *El corrido de la Revolucion*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>38</sup>Simmons, p. 52.

<sup>39</sup>Luis G. Inclán, *Astucia el Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama: Novela histórica de costumbres mexicanas con episodios originales* (México: Casa Viuda Bouret, 1908), p. 163.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 53. Unfortunately, this text and those of other authors do not include examples of these *corridos*.



### 2.2.3 EL VALIENTE

The character of the *charro* in the films together with the content of some of the narratives of the songs presents the image of a man who boasts of his valour. The *rancheras* have been criticized for 'creating' this image of the *charro* as a 'macho'. These songs use various expressions which show this, for example the phrases: *soy valiente*, *braga'o* and *no soy un raja'o*. However, these expressions are intended to parody the *macho* or *valiente*. These characteristics are present in numerous *corridos* praising the various regions and the bravery of their men in a type of self-mockery. Under Spanish influence these songs make fun of the hero's bravado: "of sheer bravado in which a 'valiente' of a given region indulges in unvarnished bombast, vain gloriously boasting of his own bravery and valor while challenging any son of any other region who might be so rash as to cross him."<sup>41</sup> Some examples have been found in the Vanegas Arroyo *hojas sueltas*, but this type of *corridos* continued to be sung until the period of the Revolution with titles such as: *El Valiente de Guadalajara* and *El valiente Costeño*.<sup>42</sup> The *corrido* *El valiente del Bajío*, probably written before the Revolution, is an example of this type of *corrido* of self-mockery:

Aquí estoy porque ya vine,  
porque quiero y porque sí,  
y vengo a ver si encuentro' uno,  
que pueda igualarse a mí.

Soy de Ranchería de Amoles,  
de la pura Sierra soy,  
y soy de lo más hambrote,  
y a cualquiera parte voy.

.....

Soy su papacito chulo  
a quien han de respetar;  
no'más no revuelvan l' agua,  
porque se la han de tragar.<sup>43</sup>

This self-mockery passed into the image of the *charro cantor* and his music, the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 58. According to Simmons this type of *corrido* has their origins in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain in the *romances a lo valentón*.

<sup>42</sup>Idem. Simmons points out that the earliest broad sheet that she saw was *El valiente de Guadalajara* (1913) but *El valiente costeño* although no date is given was probably printed earlier.

<sup>43</sup>Idem



*canciones rancheras*. In the films, the character of the *charro* brags of his valour but there is self-mockery. This is re-inforced by the lyrics in his repertoire. Nevertheless, when the image of the *charro* and the songs were taken out of the context of the films - especially when the government made use of popular culture- the self mockery and parody disappeared. What remained was a “serious” representation of the *charro* and the Mexican as a man who could stand up to anyone. This was re-inforced by nationalistic symbols which accompanied the *charro*, for example the Mexican eagle, symbol of the origins of the nation, emblazoned on his shirt.



## CHAPTER 3. THE *CHARRO* BECOMES AN ENTERTAINER

The introduction of “talkies” in Mexico in the 1930s began to require not only dialogue but also music and songs. Cinema producers turned to popular culture for inspiration and experimented. From the *teatro de revistas*, they took and reworked the image of one of the key characters; the *charro*, which many of the cinema audience would have already seen on the stage. They used popular music in specific scenes with the settings in *lugares típicos* such as *ranchos*, popular rendezvous (Xochimilco and the town of Santa Anita) and the reproduction of regional and class stereotypes. However, they reduced the sexual innuendo and omitted the topical political satire. In 1936 with the films *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (dir. Fernando de Fuentes), *¡Ora Ponciano!* (dir. Gabriel Soriás) and *Cielito Lindo* (dir. Roberto O’Quigley) the *comedias rancheras* and their musical counterparts the *canciones rancheras* were born. These images of the real *charros* were still alive in the memory of the rural migrant to the city. They were also rooted in the public imagination through many popular forms such as *corridos*, serials and the *teatro de género menor* of the nineteenth century.

### 3.1 THE *CHARRO* IN POPULAR THEATRE

The image of the *charro* began to appear in the theatre as a symbol of a Mexican national identity distinct from Spain as early as the late eighteenth century. In 1797, José Agustín de Castro wrote the play *El Charro* which is described as “un pequeño cuadro de costumbres”.<sup>1</sup> However, it was some time later in the 1850s that, following the drafting of the Constitution, in 1857, a surge of nationalism began to influence the theatre. The desire to create a “national” theatre began with the development of *tipos nacionales* such as the *charros*, and the setting in a rural atmosphere. The Mexican comedy *La ranchera de San Miguel El Grande o la Feria de San Juan de los Lagos*, performed in 1858, is considered to be one of the first successful attempts to recreate the Mexican rural atmosphere; it was also an attempt to develop the characters of the *charros* and *chinas*. It included Mexican music: “bailecitos del país y música de bandolones”.<sup>2</sup> Other productions followed, and a year later, in 1859, the *cuadro de costumbres Un paseo en Santa Anita* by José Casanova and Víctor Landaluce with music by Antonio Barilli was well received by the public and critics. It consisted of two acts. The setting was Santa Anita, a town near Mexico City, which the inhabitants of the capital were wont to visit on excursions to enjoy themselves among the canals, markets and gardens. The music captures the joyful atmosphere, and was praised by the critics

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<sup>1</sup>Pedro Henríquez Ureña, *Estudios mexicanos* (México: FCE, 1984), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>Enrique de Olavarria y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro en México: 1538-1911*, prefaced and updated to 1961 by Salvador Norvo, 5 vols (México: Porrúa, 1961), I, p. 654.



because: “cuando su argumento lo pedía se bailaron el jarabe y otros aires nacionales, con acompañamiento de una banda de jaranas y bandolones.”<sup>3</sup> Gerald Martin traces this as the forerunner of one of the most popular theatre genres in the next century, the *revistas*, which in turn influenced various types of films, among them the *comedias rancheras*.<sup>4</sup>

At about the same time (the 1850s), there was a revival in Spain of the *zarzuela* as light entertainment. Its prompt “export” to Mexico influenced the development of the Mexican popular theatre and continued to do so until the early part of the twentieth century. The *zarzuela* is a partly sung and partly spoken entertainment, a sort of operetta, which had been created in Spain in 1657 by the writer Fernando Calderón de la Barca as a royal entertainment performed in the palace of the Zarzuela, hence its name. It declined in the eighteenth century but it reappeared in the mid 1850’s as light entertainment in the public theatres. The *zarzuelas* presented in Mexico shortly afterwards were the work of Spanish composers and writers and were performed by Spanish actors and singers.

The *zarzuela* takes many forms. It might consist of one, two or three acts, sometimes with a single story like the operetta; alternatively, there might be a series of disparate scenes, as in a revue. The style of singing resembles in some ways that of the Viennese or French operetta but has a strong Spanish flavour. The settings are Spanish regional, as are the characters. They might include topical and local references and sometimes political satire, much as in the English “Pantomime”. There were many composers, among them the brothers, Serafín Alvarez Quintero (1871-1938) and Joaquín Alvarez Quintero (1873-1944) who recreated Andalusian *costumbrismo*; Carlos Arniche (1866-1943), who captured the atmosphere and the slang of Madrid, and Tomás Bretón (1850-1923), who wrote *La Verbena de la Paloma* in 1897.<sup>5</sup> Performed in Spanish, not in a foreign language like the Grand Opera, the *zarzuelas* appealed to a wider public and were immediately accepted by Mexican audiences. The structure enabled this form to be subsequently adapted by Mexican writers in an attempt to develop a national popular theatre. These writers transferred the settings to the regions of Mexico; they began to develop “tipos nacionales” both from the city and the countryside but from an urban point of view.

In the 1880s, the Mexican poet Juan de Dios Peza, together with the composer Luis

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 660.

<sup>4</sup>Gerald Martin, ‘Literature, Music and Art of Latin America: from Independence to 1870’, in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. by Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), III, pp. 797-839 (pp. 814-15).

<sup>5</sup>P. E. Russel, ‘Spanish Literature: 1474-1681’, in *Spain: Companion to Spanish Studies*, ed. by P.E. Russel (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 265-380 (p. 367).



Arcaraz, among others, had produced a series of Mexican *zarzuelas* which competed successfully with the Spanish productions. In 1886, they produced *Una fiesta en Santa Anita*, one of the most popular and influential Mexican *zarzuelas*, which was itself influenced by the earlier “cuadro de costumbres” *Un paseo en Santa Anita*.<sup>6</sup> The critics at the time claimed that this was one of the first national productions able to capture the rural atmosphere of Xochimilco, the market town near Mexico City. The canals, *trajineras* (small boats decorated with flowers) and *chinampas* (islands used for agriculture dating back to the Aztecs) are evoked, as are the *charros* and *chinas* and *vendedores* which inhabit the area. According to the theatre critic, *Titania*, from the newspaper *El Diario del Hogar*, of September 9th, 1886, people had been eagerly awaiting this zarzuela:

Después de esta zarzuela [the same night people had seen another zarzuela *El estreno de una artista*] se notó una situación curiosa e impaciente en la sala: iba a representarse la deseada *Fiesta en Santa Anita*, y cuando se levantó el telón estalló un aplauso atronador. El golpe de vista fue muy bonito y característico, mostrándonos una decoración que reproducía con gusto y fidelidad el pintoresco pueblo de las chinampas.<sup>7</sup>

This critic added that the Spanish actress Adela Montañez was well received by the public when she appeared dressed in the Mexican national costume of the *china poblana*: “se volvieron locos al ver a la Montañez vestida de china, con un rico castor lentejueleado, una camisa primorosamente bordada de colores, un rebozo de seda verde, unas zapatillas azules bordadas de oro y una cinta encarnada en su negra cabellera.”<sup>8</sup> Similar clothes were later worn by the female *ranchera* singers. The actor Isidoro Pastor was also applauded when he appeared in his *charro* costume:

Los espectadores aclamaron a Pastor cuando apareció llevando con gallardía el ajustado pantalón con botonaduras de plata, la chaqueta con chapetones y agujetas del mismo metal, la camisa llena de bordados, la corbata tejida de seda roja, la banda de burato, los zapatos bayos, el sarape,

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<sup>6</sup>Gerald Martin, ‘Literature, Music and the Visual Arts. 1870-1930’, in *A Cultural History of Latin America: Literature, music and the visual arts in the 19th and 20th centuries*, ed by Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 47-130 (p. 58).

<sup>7</sup>Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el Porfirismo*, 2 vols (México: UNAM, 1964), I, pp. 286-87. All the following quotes are taken from this book. This writer does not tell us the identity of the critic *Titania*

<sup>8</sup>Idem



The critic *Titania* found the music very beautiful. In his comments on the music he describes the type of music which was performed as including Mexican songs together with music and dance from other countries, even Africa: “El primer coro es *entrainant*, acabando con una danza que respira la voluptuosidad y languidez que caracterizan este baile nacido al ardiente sol de Africa...”; the next piece, he added, was “un dúo que termina con la deliciosa canción mexicana de ‘El Turrón’.”<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, what he liked most was the *melopea* (verses accompanied by rhythmic music): “donde se ha distinguido más el compositor...los versos son fluidos y elegantes y el diálogo muy brillante, alternando chistes de buen tono.”<sup>11</sup> He praised the way Montañez delivered it. Apart from the *charros* and *chinas*, this *zarzuela* began to incorporate the city’s “gente del pueblo” such as *enchiladeras* (sellers of enchiladas), *vendedores* (street sellers), *tamaleras* (sellers of tamales), *cargadores*, *aguadores* (sellers of water), *gendarmes*, *pilluelos*, *rotos* (people wearing good clothes but with no money, “spivs”) and *inditos* (indigenous people wearing their native clothes).

With the success of this *zarzuela* and, in 1887, the renewed popularity of bullfighting in Mexico City, (it had been banned by the government of Benito Juárez in 1867), and the development of the *charrería* as professional entertainment, impresarios began to capitalize on its popularity by putting on Mexican *zarzuelas* with *charros* and *toreros*. *Charrería* had changed from a rural entertainment to a professional performance, where people paid to see famous performing *charros* such as the brothers Agustín and Vicente Oropeza and Celso González who toured Mexico (and, in 1889, Spain) demonstrating the various skills of the *charrería* and *toreo a la mexicana*.<sup>12</sup> In 1894 the brothers Oropeza had toured the country and the US, joining Buffalo Bill’s show, for a brief period. Together with other *charros* they participated in the Paris Exposition of 1900 and later toured other European countries.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the figure most remembered in *corridos*, *zarzuelas*, *revistas* and the cinema was Ponciano Díaz Salinas (?-1899), who became well known for his *banderillas a caballo a dos manos*.<sup>14</sup> He was born in the Hacienda Atenco, the first *ganadería de reses bravas* (bulls specially bred for the bullfights). He was a bullfighter, but he is also believed to have been one of the

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<sup>9</sup>Idem

<sup>10</sup>Idem

<sup>11</sup>Idem

<sup>12</sup>In 1922, the *Asociación Nacional de Charros* was founded in Mexico City and in 1933 the *charros* received official recognition and *charrería* was declared a sport by the Confederación Deportiva Mexicana.

<sup>13</sup>Leovigildo Islas Escárcega, ‘Síntesis histórica de la charrería’, in *Artes de México*, 99 (1967), pp. 13-19 (p. 17).

<sup>14</sup>*Anom. Enciclopedia de México*, II, p. 1206.



first professional *charros* in the entertainment industry. The impresario José Joaquín Cleofas Moreno, nicknamed “El Rey de la Zarzuela”, taking advantage of the popularity of Ponciano Díaz, presented in 1887 the one act *juguete cómico* *¡Ora Ponciano!*, in the *Gran Teatro Nacional* with the *Compañía de Zarzuela*. One theatre critic tells us that the programme did not state the names of the writer and composer; they are however, believed to have been Juan de Dios Peza and Luis Arcaraz. *¡Ora Ponciano!* was set in the bullring and featured a lively dance and merry songs and the *toque maten al toro*. The spectacle of the bullfight, with the *trajes de luces* and the music, had been transferred to the theatre. The same year, Cleofas Moreno continued to exploit the popularity of Ponciano Díaz and his Spanish “rival”, the bullfighter Luis Mazzantini, presenting *Ponciano y Mazzantini*, a *zarzuela* in one act with different *cuadros* (scenes) by the leading Mexican dramatist Juan A. Mateos and his collaborator the composer José Austri. In order to attract the public, the actors appeared dressed in the original *trajes de luces* of Díaz and Mazzantini. The following is a summary of its content, described by one theatre critic at the time:

La primera escena presenta la partida de Mazzantini para América acompañado por su cuadrilla y algunas manolas. En la segunda se ven los buques cruzando el mar llevando uno de ellos al gran torero. La tercera escena es una fonda en México a la que llega una familia del interior siendo el senador y su esposa dos tipos muy conocidos y muy delineados. Aparece Ponciano Díaz vestido de charro y después se presentan éste y Mazzantini llevando sus trajes de torero, pronuncian los dos diestros bellas y sentidas frases que excitan el entusiasmo del auditorio y luego se abrazan, y viene la reconciliación de los poncianistas y los mazzantinistas, terminando la pieza alegremente.<sup>15</sup>

The music, an important element in the *zarzuelas*, was also praised but the critic does not tell the reader exactly which pieces were performed: “La música encierra algunos trozos de mérito, entre ellos una hermosa romanza de barítono, una característica danza, una brillante canción y muy bonitos coros.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1888 the ex-actor and now impresario Isidoro Pastor presented the Spanish zarzuela *La Gran Vía*, and fearing that the public would not respond to its original *madrileño* flavour, added some extra dialogue praising the Mexican Ponciano Díaz. The image of

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<sup>15</sup>*Titania, El diario del hogar*, 19 January 1888, quoted in Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el Porfirismo*, 2 vols (México: UNAM, 1965), II, pp. 56-57.

<sup>16</sup>*Idem*



this *matador* continued to be included in the popular theatre and later in the cinema. Years later, in 1932, the actor and impresario Roberto Soto and his *Compañía de Revistas Selectas* presented the revista *¡Ora Ponciano!* in their season in the *Teatro Esperanza Iris*.<sup>17</sup> The same company revived in 1934 the story of Ponciano Díaz in the revista “*Alma Torera*” with dances and songs from the early twentieth century, with the actor Joaquín Pardavé playing the central role.<sup>18</sup> In 1936, the “talkies” took up the theme again, and the film *¡Ora Ponciano!* (dir. Gabriel Soriás) shared the success of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* as one of the films which rescued the declining Mexican film industry. Thus began the *comedias rancheras*. In this film the *Trío Calaveras*, who accompanied Jorge Negrete in many of his songs, sang *El Toro Coquito* (Barcelata-Cortázar). However, by the 1940s Ponciano Díaz himself had faded from popular memory.

In the 1880s, strong competition among the theatres had caused the impresarios to establish the “funciones de tandas”. *Tandas* (or “turns”) was the name given to the acts into which performances were divided. Members of the public were able to purchase individual tickets for as many *tandas* as they could afford. This system was very profitable for the impresarios and convenient for the public who could choose to pay only for the *tandas* they attended instead of for the complete performance. Each *tanda* offered a main attraction such as a new song, a dance routine and of course pretty *tiples* (soprano *zarzuela* singers) with short skirts and seductive gestures. The result of this system was a diverse audience from different social classes, who had now the power to choose only the performance they wanted to see. The *tandas* were viewed with disapproval by the “buena sociedad”; nevertheless, many men from the bourgeoisie attended. One critic described the public who attended the *tandas* as: “la gente alegremente despreocupada, la que necesita concurrir a una o dos de esas tandas para no acostarse demasiado temprano, y los calaveras y tenorios que cenar tarde y no gustan de cenar solos.”<sup>19</sup> Some theatre critics complained that the impresarios of these shows were not interested in the quality of the performances but only in making money:

Por eso las Empresas de esos espectáculos no se preocupan con elegir bien sus obras, ni presentarlas bien, ni con que duren o no duren mucho en el cartel... basta que las actrices sean guapas y bien formadas, que vistan con elegancia y no se resistan a aligerar o recortar esos vestidos cuando el argumento lo pida, que tengan gracia y soltura escénicas, y la voz

<sup>17</sup>Olavarría y Ferrari, V, pp. 3492-505.

<sup>18</sup>José de Jesús Nuñez y Domínguez, *Descorriendo el telón: cuarenta años de teatro en México* (Madrid: Rollán, 1956), p. 349.

<sup>19</sup>Olavarría, II, pp. 1753-54.



In spite of this judgment, it was from performances like these that the theatres made money; thus, they flourished. They also provided a space where the dictatorship and its views on morality and political oppression could be challenged, both by the dialogue and by the sexual innuendo in the lyrics of the songs.

The development of a national theatre was soon cut short during the rest of the Porfirista regime through an agreement between the Mexican government and the Spanish Crown. From the 14th of October, 1895, both governments enforced the *Tratado de Propiedad Literaria y Artística*. In theory this treaty was instigated in order to ensure payment of performance rights and royalties to the original composers and writers of any work publicly performed. It was also meant to ensure the performance of the original scores -at the time impresarios changed librettos and Mexican composers wrote the arrangements of many scores from foreign operas and *zarzuelas*.<sup>21</sup> However, a few writers raised their concerns that this treaty acted against the development of a national theatre. They argued that in Mexico and Spain there was a disproportionate number of Spanish writers and a very small number of Mexicans, thus, immediately, there was a restriction on impresarios willing to put on untried Mexican *zarzuelas*. After the enforcement of this treaty in 1895, the number of foreign plays and Spanish *zarzuelas* greatly increased, while Mexican works decreased. One of the last Mexican productions to be performed for many years was the play *El charro* in which there was a *danzón* by José Rivas.<sup>22</sup>

With the aforementioned treaty, Mexican writers and composers were at a disadvantage with no union to protect them and no backing from the government. Meanwhile, the Spanish writers were already organized in an association, which, through a representative in Mexico, imposed terms and conditions on the performance of their *zarzuelas* and plays. The appointment of one representative of the Spanish association in Mexico who collected their royalties led to a monopoly granted to one particular theatre to put on all the new Spanish *zarzuelas*, leaving the other theatres without access to new material. This led to years of protest and arguments between the representatives of the Spanish Association and the impresarios in Mexico of the theatres that did not have access to the new plays or the performance of the old ones. The impresarios of the most important theatres in Mexico City who had the contract with the Spanish representatives would not put on Mexican *zarzuelas*, firstly, to avoid paying royalties

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<sup>20</sup>Idem

<sup>21</sup>Idem

<sup>22</sup>Idem



twice and secondly, because it was safer to put on *zarzuelas* which had already been successful in Spain. The owners of *El Principal* (*Empresa Arcaraz Hermanos Sucesores* owned by the Moriones sisters) one of the main theatres in Mexico City, initially fought against the arbitrary concession which the Spanish representative had given to one particular theatre. However, once the impresarios of this theatre became the representatives of the Spanish writers, they banned any plays by Mexican writers. When Mexican writers and composers asked the government for help, government's supporters used the official press to criticize the Spanish *zarzuelas de género chico* and advised Mexican composers to write *teatro de género mayor* resembling French, German and Spanish drama or Italian opera, Viennese operetta, or *zarzuela grande* with writers such as Tomás Bretón and Carlos Arniche.

From the beginning of the dictatorship in 1876 to 1900, out of 1,130 plays only 100 were by Mexican writers and composers.<sup>23</sup> To counteract this, the first attempt to form a Mexican association of writers was begun in 1902 by the composer and poet Juan de Dios Peza and other composers and writers who felt the need to be united. It started as the *Sociedad de Autores Líricos, Dramáticos, Escritores y Artistas* with the aim of encouraging and protecting the interests of all Mexican writers and composers of drama, *zarzuelas de género chico y grande* and operas. Their intention was to counteract the monopoly of the Spanish plays and dramas in Mexican theatres. But it was very soon taken over by the followers of the Porfirista regime, beginning with the proposal by Nicolás Mariscal (the Foreign Minister) to change its name to *Ateneo Mexicano Literario y Artístico*. In spite of the reluctance of some of its members, among them Juan de Dios Peza, the name was changed and Porfirio Díaz was named "*socio protector insigne y Presidente nato*". From then on, the nature of the association changed and some of the members refused to accept the writers of the *género chico popular*. It became a sort of *velada literaria* offering a platform for speeches, concerts (of European composers), recitals. It had very little to do with the protection of Mexican writers and support for the performance of their plays or *zarzuelas* in Mexican theatres. It was at one of these *veladas* that a young poet José F. Elizondo (1880-1940 or 43) participated. He was to become an important figure in the development of Mexican popular theatre and its political satire and sexual innuendo. Although he is almost forgotten now, his work was very influential in the development of the Mexican *revistas* of this period of transition between the end of the Díaz dictatorship and the Revolution of 1910.

Elizondo, together with a number of other Mexican writers, began to challenge the Spanish monopoly by writing parodies of the Spanish *zarzuelas*. In 1902 his Mexican *zarzuela La Gran Avenida*, a parody of the nineteenth century Spanish *zarzuela La*

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<sup>23</sup>Reyes de la Maza, I, p. 49.



*Gran Vía*, in the theatre *El Principal*, began a series of parodies which later developed into the *revistas*, a genre in its own right. From the Spanish *zarzuela* he began to take some elements such as farce and the use of “tipos nacionales”. The Spanish *naranjera* gave way to the Mexican *ranchera* or *china*. He also moved the setting to Mexico City and its outskirts, and from the original Spanish form took the light satire against the government and the local authorities, which was later interspersed with sexual innuendo.<sup>24</sup>

Two years later, in 1904, Elizondo formed another association, the *Sociedad Mexicana de Autores* (15th February, 1904) to try to put on his productions in the theatres. After some disagreement with the other Mexican union led by the actor René Cardona: *Unión de Actores of Sociedad Cardona Illanes* they finally joined forces together on the 23rd of May of the same year. They were encouraged by the success on the 9th of April 1904 of the Mexican *revista Chin Chun Chan* in the theatre *El Principal*. It was written by Elizondo and Rafael Medina with music by Luis G. Jordá and directed by Manuel Gutiérrez.<sup>25</sup> This *revista* is considered to be the model from which the modern Mexican *revistas* developed. It brought together elements already present in Mexican popular theatre and essential for the *revistas*: farce, the casting of *tipos del pueblo* such as Columbo Pajarete, the main character, the *payos* (rural dwellers in the city), the use of popular sayings, mis-pronunciations, the humor with sexual innuendo, which veiled the political satire, all seen through the eyes of the city dwellers.<sup>26</sup> Many of the scenes were excuses to introduce poems and songs with lyrics with sexual innuendo, which seemed to dilute their social comment and political satire, thus avoiding the censorship of the Díaz regime. The *comedias rancheras* took some of these elements such as the characters. They parodied the rural dwellers and their language, mixing it with the slang and sayings of the city's *barrios*. However, they omitted the political comments.

Elizondo's success was isolated. The impresarios of *El Principal* who until then had no access to the Spanish *zarzuelas*, had been putting on the work of some Mexican writers and composers, but when they finally signed a direct contract with the *Sociedad Madrileña* they lost interest in Mexican productions. After a disastrous economic season, the company tried to change its image and published in the newspaper *El Imparcial* a short report informing the Mexican writers of *género chico* that their plays were banned from their theatre:

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<sup>24</sup>Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, ed. *El país de las tandas* (México: Museo Nacional de las Culturas, 1984), p. 18.

<sup>25</sup>Idem

<sup>26</sup>Idem

No más zarzuelas mexicanas. Desde que se conocieron las condiciones del contrato celebrado entre la Empresa Arcaraz y la Sociedad de Autores Españoles, se comprendió que en un día más o menos remoto, las obras mexicanas serían desterradas del Teatro Principal, por inútiles e inconvenientes para los intereses de la Empresa. La profesía ha venido a cumplirse, y la Empresa ha notificado terminantemente a la Sociedad de Autores mexicanos que en lo sucesivo no pondrá en escena ninguna obra de autores mexicanos.<sup>27</sup>

The Mexican *Sociedad de Autores* sent an article to the same paper complaining about the banning of Mexican *zarzuelas* in *El Principal*, one of their main sources of employment, and proposed that the newspaper should act as a go-between so that the theatre would put on their plays. The newspaper refused but published an article siding with the theatre. They argued that theatre was like any other merchandise and that buyers were free to choose the products they bought. There was also a subtle defense of the regime's treaty with Spain, arguing that it was unjust that writers did not previously receive money for their work. Mexico finally put an end to this injustice by signing a bilateral treaty with Spain:

En México ese estado deplorable de cosas ha durado hasta hace muy poco; pero ha cesado al fin. La propiedad literaria y los tratados relativos son un hecho, y hoy el autor más obscuro tiene el derecho, y lo ejerce, de hacerse pagar sus producciones y de oponerse a su publicación si no le conviene.<sup>28</sup>

The article ended with the advice to the Mexican writers to leave the *género chico* to the Spanish writers and to dedicate themselves to write plays of *género grande* such as those by the brothers Alvarez Quintero.

Only one other of the big theatres of this period, *El Renacimiento*, managed to put on some *zarzuelas* and *revistas* by Mexican writers, who had been working for the theatres in the poor *barrios* such as *El Colón* that could not pay the copyright to the Spanish association. However, it was not until 1907 that the *Sociedad de Autores Mexicanos*, consisting mainly of writers of the *género chico*, wrote to the Foreign Secretary asking for a change in the *Tratado de Propiedad Literaria*. Various impresarios, writers and

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<sup>27</sup>Olavarria, IV, p. 2748.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 2749.



singers signed the petition, among them the Spanish singer of *zarzuelas* Rosa Fuertes who for this reason was dismissed from the season she was doing for *El Principal*. In a letter to the newspaper *El Imparcial*, she passionately asked for “some air” for the ailing Mexican theatre: “Es de pública notoriedad que he estampado mi firma al pie de un escrito en que se pide al señor Mariscal nada menos que un poco de oxígeno para el arte dramático mexicano y algún respeto a las leyes fundamentales del país.”<sup>29</sup> She also accused the impresarios of *El Principal* of holding a monopoly in the Mexican theatre:

He perdido mi sueldo porque mis convicciones lo han rechazado. Y sin despecho ni amargura, invito a mis compañeros a fijar sus ojos en esta carta y clavarlos después en nuestros ideales para ver con helado desprecio, las exigencias del ‘trust’ dramático de las señoras Moriones.<sup>30</sup>

Afterwards the impresarios of *El Principal* decided to sign a contract with the *Sociedad de Autores Mexicanos*, however, this was just a gesture and they continued to put on mainly Spanish works. The Mexican writers continued to write for the *jacalones*, for which they were asked to produce new material quickly which could bring in the public of the *barrios*, thus they turned to parodies of the Spanish *zarzuelas* and, to ensure financial success, included more sexual innuendo.

Elizondo kept on developing a series of parodies of the Spanish *zarzuelas* but by the end of the dictatorship there was more political satire and social comment in them. In 1908, he and Humberto Galindo put on in the *Teatro Guerrero*, one of the *barrio* theatres, the “*sátira cómica lírica*” *La Onda Fría*. Through satire, he criticized the division of classes and the tastes of the Porfirista bourgeoisie for French fashion and their disdain for the clothes of the rural people. One of the main characters a *Feather Boa*, is the symbol of “elegance”, wearing French fashion and the other, a *Rebozo*, represents the poor rural female inhabitant, dressed in the national clothes: “enagua de percal y rebozo fino”. The *rebozo* was also part of the costume of the female *ranchero* singers. The following is an extract from the dialogue:

Boa:                                ¡Cállate, trapa sin gracia!  
                                     me mueves á compasión,  
                                     siempre fui la aristocracia;  
                                     tú reflejas la desgracia

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 2951.

<sup>30</sup>Idem

y yo enciendo la pasión.

Rebozo: Pos humilde, cual me ve,  
juí del pueblo amigo leal,  
y si la pobreza abrigué  
en amor acompañé  
al jarano nacional!

Boa: ¿Cuándo alguna dama fina,  
cuándo alguna millonaria  
usó esa tela mezquina?

Rebozo; Y á usted, lo usó alguna china?  
¡Uju...ni la china Hilaria!

Boa: Siempre tus dichos pelados,  
soy de otra esfera social.

Rebozo: ¡La de esos desocupados  
tarugos adinerados  
que inundan la capital!<sup>31</sup>

In this dialogue the Feather Boa uses the affected language of the city's idle rich which contrasts with the rural dialect of the Rebozo, the new migrant; both accents are a theatrical creation. The dialogue is a pointed comment on the social tensions in the Mexico City of the last years of the Díaz dictatorship.

With the end of the regime, more Mexican plays were performed and rural themes began to appear mixed with sexual innuendo as a challenge to the puritanism of the dictatorship. The image of the *charro* was reworked and began to be taken up again as a symbol of Mexico, however it was within the context of parody and satire. In 1911 in the one act zarzuela *La Alegría de Vivir* by Jacinto Capella, one of the most popular *tiples* of the time María Conesa, wore a *charro* costume while dancing the *jarabe tapatío*. In the dialogues the satire describes the origins in "el pueblo" of the Mexican dance, the *jarabe*, and there are references to the poverty of the rural dwellers and the chains imposed by the Díaz regime, but there is also a certain sexual innuendo in the lyrics and, according to the theatre critics, the gestures of the actress:

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<sup>31</sup>*El país de las tandas: del Principal al Lírico*. LP. México. INSEN. 1987.



Allí nació el Jarabe, -de entre sus penas;  
se morían de hambre -sin su taquito,  
y para distraerse -de sus cadenas,  
inventaron el baile -que es tan bonito.<sup>32</sup>

During the Mexican Revolution, in 1913, two of Elizondo's plays were put on: *Las Musas del País* and *El País de la Metralla*. The former was a parody of the recently performed Spanish zarzuela *Las Musas Latinas*. From this *revista* comes the unforgettable song *Ojos Tapatíos*, which became part of the repertoire of the *ranchero* singers. The system of the *tandas* had continued and the *revistas* sometimes consisted of different acts connected by a theme or often a mixture of various unconnected items such as a small concert piece, one act zarzuelas now known as *revistas*, dialogues, comic sketches, songs, and sometimes "vistas" (short silent films).

With the end of the Díaz regime and the start of the Revolution theatres began to put on Mexican *revistas* dealing with national themes, which included political satire and sexual innuendo. Elizondo based his satire *El País de la Metralla*, on the political events of the time, which caused a furore. He dared to joke about the coup d'état of General Victoriano Huerta against the elected president Francisco I. Madero. His mockery of the revolutionaries went too far and as a result of threats he was forced to leave the country and went to Cuba where he spent five years. Rafael Gazcón, the composer of the music also suffered intimidation which led to his losing his reason and subsequent suicide. Nevertheless, in the next few years the influence of Elizondo was felt in the *revistas*, satirizing important topical social and political events, and accompanied by songs which were later taken up by the media. Many of the scriptwriters, actors and singers of the cinema and radio had begun in the popular theatre. One of them, Guz Aguila (Antonio Guzmán Aguilera), the scriptwriter of the film *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, wrote, in 1917, *El Diez por Ciento*, his first *revista* which was performed in *El Principal*. In this *revista*, he ironically criticized the Granat brothers, the cinema impresarios of this period. In 1919, *El Principal* put on the *revista 19-20* in which a sketch with an actor impersonating the ex-dictator Porfirio Díaz scandalized the critics. This *revista* also made popular the songs *La Norteña* and *Las Cuatro Milpas*.<sup>33</sup> These songs were later included in the *ranchero* repertoire.

The government of Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924), with José Vasconcelos as Minister of Education (1921-1923), began the process of consolidation of the post-revolutionary

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<sup>32</sup>Olavarria, V, p. 3348.

<sup>33</sup>Bonfil Batalla, p. 129.



nation-state and incorporated popular theatre as part of their creation of a national culture based on “el pueblo”. For Martín Barbero, with the development of industrialization after the Revolution the popular classes had become urban masses and with their presence changed the composition of, and the demands on the political powers. This critic points out that with the absence of an oligarchy to take control of the nation, the State took upon itself the role of directing and controlling the different class conflicts and aspirations. This led the State to turn to populism to “seek its national legitimacy in the masses and their aspirations”.<sup>34</sup> Martín Barbero goes on to say that the position of the state was not one of absolute power over the masses but “rather an organization of power which expressed concretely the contract between the masses and the State.”<sup>35</sup> In this “social contract” between the State and “el pueblo” the role of the State was to organize power, and in return *el pueblo*, the masses, expected certain guarantees, such as work, social services (free education and health) and of course entertainment. Thus, the government provided civic celebrations, free open air concerts and theatre as an expression of this populism. The intellectuals who created these cultural policies devised images in which “el pueblo” was portrayed as an active participant in the creation of the nation. Thus, the government of Obregón, in order to encourage the participation of the theatrical companies, offered ten thousand *pesos* to each theatre to put on productions of “*carácter mexicano*” to celebrate the real centenary of the declaration of Independence (1821) in order to eclipse the celebrations of 1910 by the Díaz regime (the beginning of the Independence movement in 1810). The Díaz dictatorship had chosen to celebrate the beginning of the struggle for Independence in order to establish the regime in the public memory before it collapsed.

As a Minister of Education, Vasconcelos was able to bring back home from exile some of the members of the intelligentsia who, in the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, an group of leading young intellectuals, had begun to develop their ideas of the Mexican nation.<sup>36</sup> Although short-lived, the Ateneo included many of the intellectuals of the last days of the Díaz dictatorship: Vasconcelos, Antonio Caso, Alfonso Reyes, Martín Luis Guzmán, the Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña and the young painter Diego Rivera. They were eager to create a national identity based on what they believed to be Mexican “culture” which included the use of popular and rural culture and the indigenous past. An example of their ideas can be seen in the last series of talks organized by this group at the end of 1913. There were participants such as Federico Gamboa, the author of the successful novel *Santa*, which was made into a silent film

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<sup>34</sup>Jesús Martín Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to the Mediations* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 157.

<sup>35</sup>*Idem*

<sup>36</sup>Christopher Michael Domínguez, *Tiros en el concierto: literatura mexicana del siglo* (México: Era, 1997), p. 65. This group started formally on the 28th October 1909, with Antonio Caso as its president.



and later became one of the first “talkies” to achieve financial success.<sup>37</sup> Another participant was the composer Manuel M. Ponce, who gave a talk called *Música popular mexicana*. This composer had been collecting and arranging music and songs from different regions in order to “save” them from being lost. These talks were not published but the content of Ponce’s contribution was later examined by Gustavo E. Campa in an article titled “*La Conferencia de Manuel M. Ponce sobre la música popular mexicana*” published in the *Gaceta Musical de México* in 1914. According to Campa, Ponce was trying, on the one hand, to define what *la canción mexicana* was, to distinguish it from the various influences such as Spanish, Italian and German influences and, on the other hand, to “save” it from disappearing.

As soon as he was in charge of the newly organized Ministry of Education, Vasconcelos began to promote the cultural policies of the government. He put education at the top of the agenda especially rural education. He began a national campaign against illiteracy which benefited 72% of the population.<sup>38</sup> With his *misiones culturales* he tried to integrate the indigenous peoples into mainstream culture. In his period of office the budget for education, which had been 6.74% from 1907 to 1910, was increased to 12% and 15%. He encouraged various studies on, and compilations of popular music, supporting ethnomusicologists such as Vicente T. Mendoza. In painting, the muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and Alfaro Siqueiros were encouraged to paint their murals on the walls of official buildings, in which “*el pueblo*” and “*campesinos*” were portrayed as the main actors in the formation of the modern nation. Diego Rivera began to rescue the work of Posada and the paintings in the *pulquerías*.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, with the support of the government, in September 1921, *El Principal* put on the *revista Aires Nacionales* and *La Tierra de los Volcanes*. Many of the actors of the *teatro de revistas* performed, among them Lupe Rivas Cacho, Pablo Prida, Carlos Ortega and Manuel Castro Padilla.<sup>40</sup> The image of the *charro* was taken up again as a strong symbol of the Mexican, both by the entertainment industry and by the government. In the *revistas* the *charro* became one of the main characters, usually displaying nationalistic symbols such as the colours of the flag in the *sarape* he wore over his shoulders with the backdrop representing the volcanoes and cactus of the

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<sup>37</sup>*Santa* was the song that launched the career of the Mexican composer Agustín Lara better known for his *boleros*.

<sup>38</sup>Fernando Horcasitas, *The Aztecs then and now* (México: Minutiae Mexicana, 1992), p. 106. This author tells us that the government of Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-46) launched a campaign against illiteracy similar to the one started by Vasconcelos. The percentage of illiterate population fell from 72% in 1921 to 51% in 1940.

<sup>39</sup>Karen Cordero Reiman, ‘*Mexican Folways y las lecturas de lo popular*’, *XIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte: Tiempo y Arte*, UNAM (1991), 409-25 (pp. 422-23).

<sup>40</sup>Bonfil Batalla, p. 129.

Mexican landscape. However, in the theatre the style of singing of some songs still had a strong flavour of the Spanish *zarzuela*. In the Mexican *revista El País de la Ilusión* (Emilio D. Uranga, Juan Arozamena, Angel Rabanal) in the song *Sombrero jarano* (recorded by Amalia Molina in 1925,) the lyrics refer to the Mexican *charro* and his pride in his *sombrero jarano*. However, the style of singing is that known as *sevillanas* and the language also includes some Andalusian pronunciation such as *calidá*.

No hay nada tan mexicano  
tan varonil y elegante  
como un sombrero jarano  
con su bordado brillante.

Mi novio que es un ranchero  
de calidá y hombría  
me regaló su sombrero  
jurándome amor un día.

Y al ver mi charro que un toro  
sale de pronto al corral  
dice con éste me atoro  
y lo montó sin pedal.<sup>41</sup>

The *Compañía de Roberto "El Panzón" Soto* began to appear in theatres like the *Lírico* from 1923 onwards and would subsequently influence the *comedias rancheras*. Singers who would become the pillars of the *canción ranchera* appeared in these theatres. Lucha Reyes, as part of the *Trío Ascencio-Reyes*, performed for the first time in 1927, at the *Lírico*, in a short season with the *Compañía de Grandes Revistas Campillo*. She had begun her career as a *tiple*, singing in the *zarzuela* style, but later after illness had affected her voice adopted the style of singing of the *cantadoras*, the female travelling singers. In Chapter 6, I will analyse one of her songs as an example of her style of singing.

In the early 1930s, popular theatre continued to attract city inhabitants with its political comments, sexual innuendo, songs and music. In 1930 the theatre *El Principal* put on the *revistas La Fuga de Oro* and *Las Plagas de México* in which the corruption of the

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<sup>41</sup>*El país de las tandas*, LP.



politicians was criticized. In 1935, *El Principal* presented the *revista Calles y más Calles* (a reference to the ex-President Plutarco Elías Calles) in which Jorge Negrete appeared as a singer without attaining stardom. However, the entertainment industry was developing with the success of the radio and the “talkies”. In 1934, the ‘sketch’ -a brief comic playlet with two or more actors- was introduced and marked the end of acts in which the whole theatre company participated. By the mid 30s the “talkies” began to expand and turn to popular culture for their inspiration. From popular theatre, the radio and the cinema took the image of the *charro* reworked it and linked it with the *mariachi* band. Cinema and radio began to attract some of the actors and singers from popular theatre. By the early 1940s the mass media had taken over from the theatre.

### 3.2 THE *CHARRO* AND THE *MARIACHI* BAND UNITE IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Nowadays, the image of the *charro cantor* is inextricably linked with the *mariachi* band, the *charro* costume and the *canciones rancheras* with the sound of guitars and the trumpet. However, the connection of all these elements began with the development of the radio, the record industry and the “talkies” in Mexico City in the 1930’s.

#### 3.2.1 THE *CHARRO* AND LA *ORQUESTA TIPICA*

The *charro cantor* and members of the *mariachi* band were not the first musicians to wear the *charro* costume. At the end of the nineteenth century, this form of dress had been taken up by another band of musicians: the *Orquesta Típica*. At the end of the nineteenth century, the term *típico* was used together with *folklórico* to represent what was Mexican. In 1884 the first *Orquesta Típica* was formed with Carlos Curti as its first director, and students of the *Conservatorio* as members of the orchestra. They all wore *charro* costumes and they included in their repertoire music which had not originally been Mexican but that had become so, such as the *habaneras*, *pasos dobles*, *mazurkas*, *polkas* and *waltzes*.<sup>42</sup> What made them different was the interpretation, using instruments such as guitar, *salterio*, violin, chelo and the *bandolón* a popular instrument in that century (bigger than the mandolin and with double strings like the lute, but thinner). In 1896, the second *Orquesta Típica* under Juan José Blanca continued the work of the first. In the twentieth century, in 1905, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, another of the composers who moved from classical music to popular music, took over as conductor of this orchestra and during the Díaz regime played privately in *restaurantes típicos* and after the Revolution, subsidized by the government, in various

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<sup>42</sup>Claes af Geijerstam, *Popular Music in Mexico* (New Mexico: University of New Mexico, 1976), p. 84.



public festivities at Chapultepec Park.<sup>43</sup> From 1920 to 1928 directed by Juan Nepomuceno Torreblanca the group changed its name to *Orquesta Típica Presidencial*, and a year later to *Orquesta Típica Lerdo de Tejada*. The *Típica* had been chosen to accompany the New York Symphonic Orchestra at the gala premier of Al Jolson's *The Singing Fool* (*La última canción*) on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1929.<sup>44</sup> After a few years and changes of name, in 1940 it became the *Orquesta Típica de la Ciudad de Mexico*, its present name.<sup>45</sup> During this period other orchestras used the title of *típicas* but were short lived.

### 3.2.2 THE *MARIACHI* BAND AND THE RADIO INDUSTRY (1930-1952)

The process of the transformation of the *mariachi* band began when they left their native Jalisco, for Mexico City began to work in popular theatre, and with the development of the radio industry and the "talkies". There are various accounts of the origins of the term *mariachi* to designate these bands of musicians. One is that the term comes from the French word *mariage* and was introduced by the French soldiers during the French Intervention (1864-1866) who hired the bands to perform at weddings. Another is that the word comes from the language of the *Cocas*, the indigenous people of the region. There are at least three uses of this word in this language: One comes from the name of the trees from whose wood the guitars (introduced by the Spanish conquistadores and the missionaries) were made; or possibly the platforms on which the people danced *jarabes*, or even the local name for the violins (*violines del cerro*).

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However, what is certain is that at the end of the nineteenth century, the name *mariachi* was applied to the various travelling bands of musicians in the state of Jalisco who played for money at private parties and public festivities. They wore regional *campesino* garments: white cotton shirt and trousers, wide-brimmed straw hat, pleated *ponchos* and red *paliacate* (a sort of cravat). Their number varied from four to 10 members playing instruments such as violins, bass guitar and the *vihuela* (a guitar shaped instrument with five-strings introduced by the Spanish missionaries during the colonial period). Their music was instrumental and mainly intended for dancing.

The *mariachi* bands began to be linked with the *charro* costume in Mexico City in the 1920s and developed together with the city's night life. There are conflicting opinions

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>44</sup>Reyes de la Maza, I, p. 87.

<sup>45</sup>David Arellano Marfiles, *La canción mexicana* (México: Florencia, 1976), pp. 58-60. Other sources give other dates.

<sup>46</sup>Rafael Hermes, *Origen e historia del mariachi* (México: Katún, 1983).



on the date of the arrival of the *mariachi* band in Mexico City. According to the critic Federico Sánchez Ventura, Catarino Reyes and his band of *mariachis* were one of the first groups to play in Garibaldi Square in 1925. He states that this band wore black *charro* costumes and started this trend which would be later taken up by many other bands until the costume virtually became a uniform for all *mariachis*.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, Yolanda Moreno Rivas claims that it was years later, at the *Feria de la Canción Mexicana* in 1927, that various groups of *mariachis jaliscienses* (from the state of Jalisco) came to perform in the Teatro Lírico, wearing *charro* costumes, among them the band of José Marmolejo and his uncle, Cirilo Marmolejo. After the *feria*, many of the groups returned to Jalisco but the Marmolejo band having achieved success in Mexico City decided to remain there.<sup>48</sup>

The development of the media, the radio, cinema and record industry in Mexico, was an essential factor in the increasing popularity of the *charro cantor*, the *mariachi* band and the *rancheras*. Radio broadcasts began in the 1920s, initially with both government and private stations competing.<sup>49</sup> However, very soon the private sector began to dominate the airwaves and in a decade of short-lived governments, the state was unable to compete with the commercial stations. By the end of the 1920s the number of radio stations had almost doubled; from 11 (7 in Mexico City and 4 in the interior) in 1925, the number had risen to 19 in 1929 (17 commercial and 2 cultural).

In the 1930s the founding of the radio station XEW “La Voz de la América desde México” would be decisive; in the development of the radio industry in general and the *charro cantor*, the *mariachi* band and the *rancheras*. This station began to broadcast on the 18th of September, 1930.<sup>50</sup> It was owned by Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta, who would later attain the concession of the RCA in Mexico and in the mid 1940s would invest in Churubusco, one of the important film studios of this period. He was also the owner of the elegant Alameda cinema in Mexico City.<sup>51</sup> In the inaugural broadcast of the XEW, the announcer read a statement in which the owners expressed their support for Mexican music and artists. This nationalism was similar to that of the post-revolutionary governments, portraying the idea of Mexico and its culture as distinct

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<sup>47</sup>*Mexican Music: Mariachi*, II, ‘Origins and History of Mariachi Music,’ Federico Sánchez Ventura. PMMC 008.

<sup>48</sup>Yolanda Moreno Rivas, *Historia de la música popular mexicana* (México: Alianza, 1979), p. 76.

<sup>49</sup>Radio broadcasting began irregularly in Mexico in 1921. After a few irregular transmissions, on the 15th September 1923, the CYB began broadcasting, it was sponsored by the cigarette factory *El Buen Tono*. Three days later, Raúl Azcárraga and Carlos Noriega Hope, the director of the newspaper *El Universal Ilustrado* started the CYJ, broadcasting classical music and regular news bulletins taken mainly from the newspapers.

<sup>50</sup>The name of the radio stations represents the frequencies allocated by the Ministry of Communications and has no particular meaning. Some stations added a rider such as “la Voz de América Latina desde América”, but they were popularly known by these letters.

<sup>51</sup>Salvador Novo, *La vida en México en el período presidencial de Manuel Avila Camacho* (México: Conacultur, 1994), p. 235.



from other cultures due to its unique roots in the Indigenous and the Spanish past:

Ahora el afán de nacionalismo adquiere un sentido de cultura netamente mexicana. Nuestra música, nuestras canciones son nuestras y tienen contenido de nuestro propio espíritu...Es necesario que se diga en otros pueblos: Así canta el alma torturada de México.<sup>52</sup>

The performers in this first broadcast included the tenors Alfonso Ortiz Tirado and Juan Arvizu; the contralto Josefina “Chacha” Aguilar and Ana María Fernández who had started in the Politeama theatre as a soprano with Tito Guizar, and later became one of Agustín Lara’s favourite singers in theatre and cabaret.<sup>53</sup> Lara’s music was played in this first broadcast as was the work of Jorge del Moral.<sup>54</sup> The reception of this station extended beyond the capital to the whole of Mexico, Cuba and most of South America.<sup>55</sup> The radio industry began to expand and attracted musicians and singers from the regions of Mexico and beyond. In addition to news broadcasts, the station transmitted a mixture of *boleros* and *canciones rancheras*, together with classical music for listeners of all social classes, interspersed with advertisements.

With the expansion of the radio industry more bands of *mariachis* and other groups began to broadcast. By 1932 José Marmolejo’s band of *mariachis* now known as *Mariachi Tapatío Marmolejo*, began to broadcast on the XEW. Two years later, in 1934, the musician Silvestre Vargas and his group Mariachi Vargas (founded in 1898 by his father Gaspar) also began to work for this station.<sup>56</sup> In their early performances these bands kept most of their traditional instruments: violins, harp, guitar (*sexta*), *vihuela* and *tololoche* or *guitarrón de golpe* (similar to a double bass).<sup>57</sup> However, by the late 1930s with the development of the *comedias rancheras*, and the record industry now better organized, most of the *mariachi* bands began to change their instruments in order to provide a backing for the solo singer: the harp finally disappeared, the *vihuela* was replaced by an extra guitar (*sexta*); and the trumpet now became indispensable. The violins remained as before<sup>58</sup> The information on why and exactly when the trumpet was introduced into the *mariachi* band is contradictory. Moreno Rivas states that there are different explanations for its introduction: one is that it was an influence from

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<sup>52</sup>Moreno Rivas, p. 86. This is a direct quotation from the inaugural speech by a radio announcer.

<sup>53</sup>From an interview in 1982 in *En el país de las tandas*. LP.

<sup>54</sup> Moreno Rivas, p. 128. This list does not include the name of the songs.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 183-84.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 182-83.

<sup>58</sup>Idem



Cuban music; according to others, she claims the influence came from jazz. She even quotes a suggestion that the idea came from the owner of the radio station XEW.<sup>59</sup>

The XEW in their search for new talent, on the 5th of September, 1935 broadcast "*La Hora del Aficionado*" for the first time. In this talent show amateurs were invited to perform and were accompanied by orchestras and *mariachi* bands. Many singers of *canciones rancheras* who later achieved fame were "discovered" on this programme, among them, Lola Beltrán "*La Reina de la Canción Ranchera*" and José Alfredo Jiménez. By the mid 1930s private stations, with the XEW at the forefront, dominated the industry. Although the government tried to establish its own station it failed to penetrate the market. In any case, the government's ideas of what was Mexican were very similar to those promoted on commercial radio. The government of Lázaro Cárdenas gave away radio sets to poor people throughout the country in order to integrate them into the nation by means of popular culture. In 1937 with the international political tensions resulting from the recognition of the oil workers' right to strike and the nationalization of this industry, the Mexican government was aware of the power of the media and the need to reinforce a national identity. The Cárdenas government introduced the one hour weekly broadcasts of "*La Hora Nacional*", which has survived to the present day. During this hour all radio stations throughout Mexico are obliged to broadcast simultaneously the official government programme. At the time in question, this programme consisted of news, mainly about government policies, civic celebrations and Mexican music ranging from classical composers, among others Manuel M. Ponce, to popular music such as *mariachi* bands and *canciones rancheras*.<sup>60</sup>

The government also turned to popular theatre. In 1937, it sponsored the *revista Rayando el Sol*, directed by Roberto Soto, which allowed to be performed in the centre of that shrine of "high culture", the theatre of *Bellas Artes*. In a series of sketches, an official history of the formation of the nation was dramatized. The *charro* and the *mariachi* together with "el pueblo" were portrayed as essential participants in the formation of nation:

*De Las Estampas del Ayer* con sus lagartijos, aguadoras, pregones y cilindreros, hasta el México actual con los ruidos radiales y automovilísticos de 1937; rancheros y rancheras, caporales y peones.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Idem

<sup>60</sup>Interview with Carlos Monsiváis. 30th March 1996. Mexico City.

<sup>61</sup>Bonfil Batalla, p. 95.



Popular dance and music were also included: Eva Beltri danced el *Jarabe tapatío* with balletic choreography, dancing on points as the Russian ballerina Pavlova had done in 1919 during her visit to Mexico. Joaquín Pardavé, a popular theatre actor and later cinema comedian, performed in the sketch *El mariachi de Cocula*.<sup>62</sup> The Revolution of 1910, on which the official discourse based its legitimacy, was also dramatized in a *cuadro* called *Episodios de la Revolución*, written by General Manuel W. González and it included representations of *soldaderas*, played among others by the actress Gloria Marín who, after her appearance in the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* in 1941, became a star. On the international scene the nationalization of the oil industry strained the political relationship between the US and Mexican governments. Thus, the Cárdenas government, in a diplomatic move, sent in the Mariachi Vargas as musical ambassadors to tour the United States and Central America.

During this decade, the radio industry was growing and in 1938, Enrique Contel and Emilio Balli started the XEQ, as a competitor to XEW even though Azcárraga, was a major shareholder in the new company.<sup>63</sup> By this time, the government had lost any chance of having a national broadcasting corporation thus civil servants had to ask the owners of the radio companies for their support in launching the government's "Campana Pro-Cultura". Various journalists of the official newspaper "EL Nacional" went to the main radio stations XEW and XEB to ask the public to support the government's campaign.

The Radio industry was now mainly at the hands of private investors and by the 1940s, the government radio stations were no match for the big commercial radio stations: the XEW, XEB and XEQ. In 1941, Azcárraga formed a national network *Radio Programas de Mexico*, which had 60 *repetidoras* in the whole country and also represented the American networks in Mexico, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the National Broadcasting System (NBS).<sup>64</sup> The number of radio stations had grown in 1942 to 125, with 34 in Mexico City. The critics of this period complained that the radio programmes in all the stations were very similar and had few innovations in their live programmes. In this period well known *mariachi* bands such as the Mariachi Vargas were accompanying *ranchero* singers like Lucha Reyes and Jorge Negrete on the radio. However, this year, the XEOX (later known as Radio Mil) began to broadcast as a competitor to the powerful XEW. It was founded by José Iturbe Limantour (grandson of José Ives Limantour, Porfirio Díaz' Minister of Finance) and Ignacio Díaz

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<sup>62</sup>Idem

<sup>63</sup>This station started to broadcast the 31st October 1938.

<sup>64</sup>Gabriel Sosa Plata, *Las mil y una radios: Una historia, un análisis actual de la radiodifusión mexicana* (México: McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 36.



Rayosa (grandson of Porfirio Díaz). In the WWII years, backed by the American agencies, this station was able to develop, but after the war and without American capital it declined. When it started it was seen as an alternative to the XEW, however later on it failed to attract enough listeners or private sponsors to its programmes. Its first broadcast on the 10th of March, 1942 was a mixture of the music the XEW was broadcasting with the emphasis on the national, for which they used the *canciones rancheras*, and what was regarded as “serious culture”, classical music and poetry.

In XEOX (Radio Mil) first broadcast, the first song was *mariachi* music with the *ranchero* singer and composer Cuco Sánchez singing *Qué bonito es querer*, and then the singer Carmen del Real accompanied by a trio; then poems were read with the music of a marimba in the background. The main event was a live broadcast from the Palacio de Bellas Artes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in which the publicity emphasized that it was to be conducted by Erich Kleiber.<sup>65</sup> A critic welcomed the new station because: “Los conciertos y programas que escuchamos son los mismos de hace seis u ocho años. Los mismos cancioneros, el mismo acompañamiento de un piano desvencijado y un plañidero y aburrido violín; o bien una orquesta que es la misma en todos los conciertos -con diferentes nombres-, acompañando a cantantes tan conocidos como antiguos en su respectivo arte”.<sup>66</sup>

In their programmes they featured *mariachi* bands and *ranchero* singers such as: *La Charrita del Norte*, *Trío Calaveras*, Rosaura Rolón and *Los Charros de Jalisco*. They also tried to include popular music from different regions of Mexico and played music by less well known groups, among them *Trio Taxqueño*, *Los trovadores Tamaulipecos*, *Trío los de la Costa*, and other countries of South America and the Caribbean: *Conjunto Cubano de Miguel A. Pazos*, *Alberto Cevalco*, an Argentinean singer and the Puerto Rican *Myrta Silvia*. Radio Mil attempted to offer alternatives to the other radio stations with: “varios radioteatros, radiocuentos y orientación sobre temas médicos, que le hicieron ganar simpatías entre las personas que preferían ‘algo más’ que las canciones de Jorge Negrete”.<sup>67</sup> They also began programmes for women, especially housewives. The owners of this station seemed to be trying to satisfy the demands of the emerging urban middle classes with the introduction of their new programmes, but did not know how to do it. The media industry was changing and they tried to offer something different from the other established stations, but they also tried to lure the artists working for the XEW or XEB. In the beginning Radio Mil contracted artists such as *Mario Talavera*, *El Trío Calaveras* and *Lorenzo Barcelata*.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Idem

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-49.

<sup>68</sup>Idem



In its first years during WWII, Radio Mil benefited from the backing of the American government through the Comité Coordinador de la Oficina Coordinadora de Asuntos Interamericanos (OCAIA), which, in collaboration with the American Department of State, was in charge of organizing the propaganda for Latin America. In the case of Radio Mil the OCAIA arranged an agreement of collaboration between the Mexican radio station and the Mutual Broadcasting System, the third biggest American network. This collaboration produced programmes in favour of the allies and placed them in the best known stations in Mexico which received sponsors and preference in the import of spare parts for the radio stations. Radio Mil produced programmes such as *Interpretación Mexicana de la Guerra* and *La lucha por la libertad* which were also transmitted on XEB. There were also broadcasts from Mexico on American networks, one of which was *Así es México*.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, after just a few years Radio Mil started to go into decline and passed into the hands of different owners, among them the owner of their rival station the XEW, Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta.

The radio in general had been supported by the policies of the government of Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952), providing tax exemptions and free permits to import equipment. However, in 1946 with the change of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) to Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the government lost its only radio station XEFO (Radio Nacional). As directors of the XEFO, the composers of *ranchero* songs Lorenzo Barcelata and Ernesto Cortázar tried to support Mexican music. However, the singers who performed on this station were the same ones who sang on the commercial stations, for example, Pedro Vargas, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, El Trío Tariácuri and El Trío Calaveras.<sup>70</sup> These two trios worked with Negrete. They wore *charro* costumes and with their guitars they usually complemented the *mariachi* band.

By the end of the 1940s the radio industry was in the hands of monopolies. Critics complained about the “*decadencia de la canción mexicana*”.<sup>71</sup> In 1947, Alonso Sordo Noriega opened the radio station XEX with the intention of polishing up the image of Mexican song by excluding a series of songs with risqué lyrics: “*desterrando todo lo innoble que pueda manchar la pureza de nuestros hijos o el recato de nuestras esposas*.”<sup>72</sup> He issued a black list of songs, among them some by the composer Agustín Lara, and *rancheras*: *La última noche*, *Diez minutos más*, *Tú ya no soplas*, *Juan Charrasqueado*, *Aventurera*, *El hijo desobediente*, *Pecadora*, *Toda una vida*, *Frío en el alma* y *Traigo mi 45*.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 56-57, quoted in José Luis Ortiz Garza, *La guerra de las ondas* (México: Planeta, 1992).

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>72</sup>Idem

<sup>73</sup>Idem



However, the introduction of television in the early 50s changed the culture industry and forced the commercial radio to change in order to survive. After the decline of Radio Mil in the 40s, it was revived in the 50s when the new owner Emilio Guillermo Salas Peyró introduced a series of changes which influenced not only this station but the whole industry in general. He began local programmes in Mexico City and certain small towns, but did not establish networks to broadcast nation-wide as its predecessors had done. The programmes consisted of only gramophone records, which cut the price of live broadcasting. However, the biggest change was on that each radio station now produced programmes for a specific social class. This was an innovation in broadcasting, very different from the way in which broadcasts had been planned in previous decades, when programmes were not made to target a specific social class. From then on, Radio Mil for example broadcast programmes for “middle class youth” using mainly American music such as jazz and rock’n roll and the XEBS, Radio Sinfonola *La estación del barrilito* was “dirigida sobre todo a adultos de “clase baja”.<sup>74</sup> The new owner also sold air time to advertising agencies according to the class of the audience: Radio Mil (XEOY) for the middle classes and Radio Sinfonola (XEBS) for the lower classes.

From then on Radio Sinfonola began to be promoted to the advertising agencies as a radio station “para satisfacer el gusto de las clases populares de la capital, con música de boleros, canciones rancheras, ritmos tropicales, etc.”<sup>75</sup> They explained that the audience “a pesar de tener ‘ingresos promedio reducidos, (es) de un gran poder adquisitivo total en el consumo de productos y artículos de primera necesidad, como accesorios, de diversión, de aseo e higiene, de radio y televisores”.<sup>76</sup> Radio Sinfonola based most of its programmes on the recordings of established *ranchero* singers such as Tito Guizar, Lucha Reyes, Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete and the new ones such as José Alfredo Jiménez, Javier Solís, Miguel Aceves Mejía, Lola Beltrán, María de Lourdes, Lucha Villa and Vicente Fernández. In 1950, the masses had great access to the radio. The ownership of radio sets had grown to 1.8 million.<sup>77</sup> Most families at this time would have possessed a mains radio, often bought on hire purchase; in addition there would have been the communal use of radios in the *vecindades* of Mexico City. The *rancheras* were now part of mass culture, a commodity like detergents or fizzy drinks. Women were targeted by advertisers according to their class; for the women in the *barrios* the radio was an important part of their social life in shared spaces like the communal “wash-houses” in the *patios* of the *vecindades*. In these places women could hear the radio through open windows and doors. The *rancheras* were also associated with the advertisements for beer and cigarettes aimed at men listening in workshops and

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>76</sup>Idem

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 38.



*cantinas*. It was becoming part of their lives and informed their sense of identity. The government for its part continued to use the *charro* as an image of the Mexican in public celebrations, but the repertoire consisted not of contemporary *rancheras*, but of the old songs dealing with patriotic themes and revolutionary *corridos*.

Thus, in the process of the development of mass culture there were changes in the relationship between the cultural policies of the state and the media. However, from the 30s until the early 50s the *canciones rancheras* functioned as a key mediation between the two. On the one hand, the government took the *rancheras* as part of its official discourse to support and promote its idea of a single nation, erasing differences in ethnicity and regional and class divisions. This was a significant factor in the unification of the post-revolutionary Mexican nation-state. On the other hand, the owners of the media supported the government and its version of what was Mexican, and used the *rancheras* to protect their market from the pressures from abroad. The *rancheras* thus aided both the consolidation of the nation-state and the development of a private media industry. They also mediated between the transition from the rural to an urban population. There are no exact figures for internal migration, but the growth of the city shows the number of people who moved from the rural areas to the cities. In 1930 there were 968,443 inhabitants in Mexico City; the census having included the outskirt towns of Tacubaya, Tacuba and Mixcoac as an acknowledgment of the growth of the City.<sup>78</sup> In 1953 the number of inhabitants in the City had risen to 3,050,443.<sup>79</sup> In the *charro cantor*, the *mariachis* and the *rancheras* “lo popular” represented the memory of their rural fairs, the cockfights, and the music of the *fiestas*. These events gave the masses an identity in the amorphous anonymity of the city. The *rancheras* were a reminder of the presence of the masses in the city and these masses as the *rancheras* “llegaron para quedarse”.<sup>80</sup> They were there to stay.

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<sup>78</sup>*El Universal*, ‘Muy cerca de un millón de habitantes en la ciudad’, 21 May 1930, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup>José Ernesto Infante Quintanilla, *Pedro Infante, el máximo ídolo de México: vida, obra, muerte y leyenda* (Nuevo León: Castillo, 1992), p. 73.

<sup>80</sup>The slogan of one of the radio stations in Mexico City was “la música que llegó para quedarse”.



## CHAPTER 4. THE *CHARRO* AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CINEMA (1920-1952)

The image of the *charro* had been present in Mexican popular culture since the nineteenth century in serials, *corridos* and popular theatre; but it was the cinema which gave the *charro* a face. After the Revolution, there was general agreement between the owners of the mass media and the governments of Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924) and his successors on the image of “lo mexicano”. In the process of the development of the culture industry, the mass media had been influenced by popular culture so the government found in the cinema and the radio the images it needed to create a personification of a national identity which would further their aim of creating a united country. While the relationship between the state and the media fluctuated: the state made efforts to control the media through legislation. In practice, both the governments after the revolution and the owners of the media seemed to have the same idea of a national culture.

The government of Obregón, with his Minister of Education José Vasconcelos, was anxious to utilize popular culture to counteract the effect of the Díaz regime with its extravagant civic celebrations. However, they failed to invest in the cinema. It was the government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) which provided funds for the cinema and which supported the incorporation of the *charro* and the music of the *canción ranchera*, together with other aspects of the popular theatre such as the *mariachis*, to be part of the representation of a Mexican national culture. According to Monsiváis “desde los 1930s con el desarrollo del cine y de la radio el gobierno deja la educación de las masas a los medios de comunicación, al mismo tiempo no logra mantener las propiedades de alta cultura”.<sup>1</sup> In order to put the development of the *charro cantor* in the cinema into context, I will trace the development of the film industry in Mexico in the 1920s, a period of change between the silent cinema and the “talkies”. This chapter will continue with the study of the introduction of the “talkies” and the birth of the films *comedias rancheras* and the *charro cantor*. The last section looks at the expansion of the Mexican film industry in the 1940s during WWII, and its decline during the Presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952).

### 4.1. THE SILENT CINEMA IN THE 1920s

The 1920s began with the assassination of President Carranza. The interim President, Adolfo de la Huerta, in his short government of six months, abolished film censorship.

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<sup>1</sup>Carlos Monsiváis, “Notas sobre la cultura popular en México”, *Latin American Perspectives*, 16, (1978), 98-118 (p.118).



However, this was soon restored by the government of Álvaro Obregón, who ironically began a series of reforms to satisfy the key demands of the revolution: education, redistribution of land and the protection of the workers. As previously mentioned, during Obregon's government, long-lasting cultural policies by his Minister of Education, José Vasconcelos (1921-23) were to influence future governments. A series of newsreels and documentary films were made, but "several people accused Vasconcelos directly of not promoting the national cinema".<sup>2</sup> Vasconcelos explained in his memoirs how with a meagre national budget he had to fight very hard to get a bigger share for education, while other ministries saw themselves as having priority. Other ministries such as War and Navy, and Agriculture and Development also managed to produce scientific and educational films. The National History, Ethnography and Archaeology Museum produced *Fiestas de Chalma* in 1922, a type of interdisciplinary film produced by the ethnographer Miguel de Mendizábal, with the collaboration of the musicologist Francisco Domínguez, the historian Enrique Juan Palacios and the ethnologist Canuto Flores.<sup>3</sup>

According to the film critic Aurelio de los Reyes during this period the Mexican film industry was deprived of government support and the US was allowed to expand its stake and take over distribution of one of the key areas of the industry. The Olimpia circuit, the largest in Mexico, owned by the Granat brothers, was bought by US investors: "in a rather shady deal."<sup>4</sup> From then on Reyes adds "the real problem was that the government never curtailed the US cinema's formidable competition".<sup>5</sup> The influence of the US film industry in Mexico continued to grow during the period called the "Maximato"; this includes the government of General Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) and the following governments which were under his strong influence: those of Emilio Portes Gil (1928-1930), Pascual Ortiz Rubio ((1930-1932) and Abelardo Rodríguez (1932-1934). There were very few films made during this period. However, there were various events that influenced production in the film industry. During the presidency of Calles, the clash between the Mexican government and the catholic Church led to the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929).<sup>6</sup> Aurelio de los Reyes tells us that there was film censorship during this period, and the Cristero revolt became one more taboo subject for the cinema to avoid, as was any real criticism of the Revolution. From this period there emerge two films which appear to deal obliquely with the former theme: *El Cristo de Oro* (Manuel R. Ojeda and Basilio Zubiaur, 1926), which was set in the past, and *El coloso de mármol* (Manuel R. Ojeda, 1928), which described

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<sup>2</sup>Aurelio de los Reyes, 'The Silent Cinema', in *Mexican Cinema*, ed. by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 63-78 (p. 77).

<sup>3</sup>Idem

<sup>4</sup>Idem

<sup>5</sup>Idem

<sup>6</sup>For a more detailed analysis of this movement see Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: the Mexican People Between Church and State, 1926-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).



an earlier revolt against the government. The film *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!*, which was made in 1941, was based on a book about the Cristero War. However, the director contrived to omit any reference to this conflict and turned the film into a comedy. This film, which will be analysed in detail in Chapter 6, made a star of Jorge Negrete, and with its theme song established the repertoire of the *charro cantor*.

By the end of the 1920s, the government in Mexico City established regulations for the performance of public shows: there was a division between cultural shows and entertainment. The former included concerts, poetry, opera, drama, comedy, ballet, children's theatre and the "cinematógrafo en casos especiales".<sup>7</sup> The latter comprised "son de diversion: comedia graciosa, zarzuela, opereta, sainete, revistas, circo, gallos, cabarets, exhibiciones deportivas, toros y cinematógrafos".<sup>8</sup> This classification reflects the view of the 1920s governments that there was a division between high and low culture. Although they were prepared to use popular culture to underpin the nationalism of the day, the Mexican film industry was seen as a private enterprise which had to be controlled.

During this time, the development of the "talkies" in the US was causing anxiety in some circles in Mexico. The newspaper *El Universal* ran a campaign against the "invasión pacífica", the increasing use of English in Mexico. The writers Federico Gamboa in an article in this paper on June 2nd and Rodolfo Usigli on June 6th, 1929, had already joined the campaign. Alfonso Junco in his article "*El cinematógrafo y la invasión pacífica*" published by the same newspaper, writes that the cinema is the fastest vehicle of cultural and economic penetration which could convert Mexico into an extension of the US: "El poderío fantástico de Estados Unidos desborda de sus fronteras e inunda todos los continentes, imponiendo sus normas, gustos y maneras por una múltiple expansión -cinematográfica, lingüística, musical, etcétera..."<sup>9</sup> He sees the cinema as a powerful tool of linguistic invasion penetration: "el vehículo más rápido y universal de penetración. Habla a los ojos y a la fantasía, lo mismo al culto que al analfabeto, igual al niño que al adulto, de la propia manera en la metrópoli que en el último poblacho."<sup>10</sup> He complains that this influence had started with the American silent films, which had texts in Spanish but unnecessarily kept the English texts too.

In this article, Junco calls for government intervention in order to combat these films: "Un recio estímulo gubernamentales, libre de 'política' y saturado de patria, podría y debería realizar prodigios".<sup>11</sup> He proposes as a first practical step, the prohibition of

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<sup>7</sup>*Diario Oficial*, 'Reglamento de Espectáculos Públicos', 12 March 1929. Article 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, see Art. 3.

<sup>9</sup>*El Universal*, 4 December 1929, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>*Idem*

<sup>11</sup>*Idem*

English subtitles and films in English: “prohibir inmediatamente los textos en inglés, así como las películas habladas en tal idioma.”<sup>12</sup> He recommends the production of films emphasizing the uniqueness of Mexico with its Indigenous and Spanish past. These were the elements which writers had used to create a national literature:

Alentar empeños cinematográficos en que el atractivo irremplazable de nuestros monumentos indígenas e hispanos, las maravillas vírgenes e inagotables de nuestra naturaleza, se pusieran al servicio de argumentos limpios, salubres, autóctonos, sería labor egregiamente constructiva y patriótica...y éxito financiero de primer orden.<sup>13</sup>

Junco praises a recent film, *La boda de Rosario*, as an example of the line which the Mexican film industry should follow. This film, Junco states, while well-produced, has its faults. It creates an idealized image of Mexico with its over-emphasis on *charros* and *chinas*: “la nublada levemente la tendencia a presentar un ilusorio México de charros y chinas poblanas, exageración que, autorizada por el origen nacional de las películas, acabaría por consolidar definitivamente el ‘México de pandereta’ que ya circula en el extranjero”.<sup>14</sup> He warns that these images of the *charro* can serve to re-inforce the stereotype of Mexico abroad. The seeds of the Mexican cinema had already been sown, and in the next decade, the “talkies” would bring the *charro cantor*.

#### 4.2 THE 1930s AND THE BIRTH OF THE *CHARRO CANTOR* IN THE “TALKIES”

In the early 1930s, in spite the world economic crash, Mexico’s political institutions were settling down to a more peaceful era which allowed the development of both the radio and the “talkies”. With the appearance of the *mariachis* in the radio industry and the changes to their clothes and their style of playing in order to accompany the radio singers, the mis-en-scene was ready for the appearance of the *charro cantor* who had already been a main character in the silent cinema. The government, for its part, showed a keen interest in the cinema during this decade, both for its “educational” possibilities and its benefits as a Mexican industry, and began to support it financially.

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<sup>12</sup>Idem

<sup>13</sup>Idem

<sup>14</sup>Idem



The failure of Hollywood's "Hispanic films", provided an opportunity for Mexican film producers to try to revive an industry which was almost defunct after its failure at the end of the 1920's.<sup>15</sup> In 1929 and 1930 various Mexican "talkies" were produced using different sound systems with little box office success. The critic Jorge Alberto Lozoya tells us that *Más fuerte que el deber*, 1930, (dir Raphael J. Sevilla) was one of the first films to use "escenarios mexicanos y subraya la mexicanidad del ambiente".<sup>16</sup> He adds that this is the first film to achieve a synchronized sound in which "el apuesto galán...canta". The same year the director Miguel Contreras Torres made the film *El Caporal*, which created a romantic vision of life in the countryside. It was set in the *hacienda* and the main character was a *charro*.<sup>17</sup> This anticipated the *comedias rancheras*.

In 1931, a group of private investors, Juan de la Cruz Alarcón, the film critic Carlos Noriega Hope, Gustavo Sáenz de Sicilia, Eduardo de la Barra and Miguel Angel Frías put up the money for the film *Santa*, which is considered to be the first Mexican box office success. This story of a fallen woman was an adaptation of a successful, Zola - inspired early twentieth century novel, *Santa* (1902) by Federico Gamboa. According to John King, this film had several elements which would influence the development of Mexican cinema in the years to come. The production team and main actors had trained in Hollywood.<sup>18</sup> The director Antonio Moreno was a Spanish actor who had worked there and had been the leading man to Clara Bow in the 1927 film *It!* The actors Lupita Tovar and Donald Reed (born Ernesto Guillén) had also worked in "Hispanic" films.<sup>19</sup> However, the theme song and incidental music were written by Agustín Lara, the popular theatre, radio singer and composer.<sup>20</sup> The system used in this film to record the sound was known as an "optical sound", which was patented by two Mexican engineers living in Los Angeles, the brothers Joselito, Roberto and Ismael Rodríguez Ruelas.<sup>21</sup> The Rodríguez brothers were to return to Mexico and with their production company Rodríguez Hermanos would become important figures in the development of the Mexican film industry in general and the *comedias rancheras* in particular. After *Santa*, they were responsible for the recording system of *Mano a Mano* (1932), which

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<sup>15</sup>John King, *Magical Reels* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 31.

<sup>16</sup>Jorge Alberto Lozoya, *Cine mexicano* (México: Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía, 1992), p. 13.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>18</sup>King, pp. 31-2.

<sup>19</sup>Idem. This writer explains that before dubbing techniques were perfected films were produced between 1930-33 in Hollywood and in Paramount studios in Joinville, France, in Spanish (and in other European languages). "Hispanic" films were based on successful English language films and the actors were drawn from several Spanish speaking countries.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 42. In 1918, the director Luis G. Peredo made a film of *Santa*. In 1943, Norman Foster produced another version of *Santa*. In 1920 there was also a *revista* in the theatre Lírico. Lara would continue to compose themes for many of the "cabaret" films of the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>21</sup>Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, 'Origins, Development and Crisis of the Sound Cinema:1929-64', in *Mexican Cinema*, ed. by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 79-93 (p.80).



according to the cinema critic Emilio García Riera, was the first film to deal with the theme of *charros*.<sup>22</sup> The director of this film was the Russian, Arcady Boytler Rososky who before settling in Mexico had also worked in "Hispanic" films.<sup>23</sup> García Riera states that there are no extant copies of this film but he asserts that in the production team the brothers Joselito and Roberto Rodríguez worked for the first time with Lorenzo Barcelata (1898-1943), a composer, actor and singer, who wrote the music and songs. In the years to come the brothers Rodríguez would form a production company and were responsible for grooming Pedro Infante for stardom and for the development of the *comedias rancheras* in the 1940s and early 1950s. It was Joselito Rodríguez who directed Jorge Negrete in the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!*, and later his brother Ismael worked with Pedro Infante in many of his films and both Negrete and Infante in *Dos Tipos de Cuidado*. Meanwhile, Barcelata wrote songs with the lyricist Ernesto Cortázar for other films such as *¡Ora Ponciano!* (1936), the first version of *¡Allá en el Rancho Grande!* (1936), *La Zandunga* (1937) and the film *Jalisco Nunca Pierde* (1937), in this film Barcelata composed and sang the title song, which later became part of the *ranchero* repertoire in Jorge Negrete's version.

From the mid 30s there was a period of growth in the cinema with the funds provided by the government of Lázaro Cárdenas. With a longer term of six years, which replaced the previous presidential terms of two and four years, he began to pursue "the objectives of the Revolution, and attempted to give back to the masses their role as protagonists in the national political process."<sup>24</sup> The economic model of Cárdenas' government, based on a 'third way', made it possible for the State to reconcile the aims of the capitalist class, who were responsible for the increase in production with those of the popular classes, who were the movers of social progress.<sup>25</sup> The role of the state was as "interpelador de las masas y sus demandas y la revolución como transformación política de lo popular."<sup>26</sup> In the rhetoric of the government, *el pueblo* became participants in the building and development of the nation. Cárdenas' government tried to satisfy the demands which the *campesinos* had made in the Revolution, principally land, which Emiliano Zapata had included in his slogan "tierra y libertad". This administration, with its programme of Agrarian Reform, divided some of the *haciendas* into small plots, (*la pequeña propiedad*) in an attempt to fulfill this objective. A significant enactment of the Cárdenas government was its recognition of workers' rights, notably the right to

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<sup>22</sup>Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano: época sonora*, 9 vols (México: Nueva Imagen, 1982), I, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup>Vega, de la, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup>Jesús Martín Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to the Mediations* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 160.

<sup>25</sup>Idem

<sup>26</sup>Jesús Martín Barbero, *Proceso de comunicación y matrices de cultura: itinerario para salir de la razón dualista* (Cali: Felafacs, 1987), p. 203.



strike.<sup>27</sup> Education was also a key issue, but the emphasis was now on building up the national industry and in 1938 the *Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN)* was founded to prepare scientists and engineers in various fields to create a national industry and technology. In later years, many engineers from the IPN were to work in the film, radio and television industries.

In this process of industrialization and nationalism, the government was interested in the future of the Mexican film industry and gave its support with measures to ensure its protection and development: these included tax exemptions, loans to produce films and build studios, and support for a partnership with private industry. In 1934, after a certain amount of negotiations, the government rescued from bankruptcy the privately owned studio CLASA (Cinematográfica Latinoamericana), the first modern film studio in Mexico. At the same time, it attempted to assert its power over distribution. Government departments such as the Ministry of Education produced films. In 1934, this office, under Narciso Bassols, produced the film *Redes*, now considered a masterpiece. Directed by the Austrian Fred Zinnemann and Emilio Gómez Curiel the film depicts the struggle of the fishermen of the state of Veracruz against exploitation and argues for collectivization. Apart from some professional actors, such as David Valles and Silvio Hernández, many local fishermen participated. The photographer was Paul Strand, who, as John King points out, was instrumental with Eisenstein, in developing the aesthetic of Mexican nationalism in the cinema. King and Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro agree on the great influence of Eisenstein's unfinished film on the development of the Mexican cinema.<sup>28</sup> According to John King his legacy to the Mexican cinema was the assimilation of the 'painterly' aspects which were accessible through the 'stills' published in magazines: "the architecture of the landscape, the maguey plants, the extraordinary skies, the noble hieratic people, and the emblematic nationalism".<sup>29</sup> Vega Alfaro tells us that Eisenstein's talent allowed him "to develop cinematographic versions of some of the visual characteristics of the muralists, and of the engraving and photography movements that were cultivated in Mexico in the 20s as part of the 'national cultural' project."<sup>30</sup> Eisenstein met Diego Rivera in Mexico City and in his memoirs he thanks the artist for opening his eyes to the "fantasmagorías" of Mexico, such as the Day of the Death and to the vivid culture of this amazing country.<sup>31</sup> This influence can be seen especially in the 1940s work of the director Emilio "Indio" Fernández and the cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa.<sup>32</sup> This link is significant as

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<sup>27</sup> Idem. In the case of the oil industry, when the workers and the foreign companies were at an impasse the government intervened and nationalized the industry.

<sup>28</sup> Eisenstein arrived in Mexico in December 1930. With the support of the American writer Upton Sinclair he began shooting the unfinished *¡Qué Viva México!* in February 1931.

<sup>29</sup> King, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> Vega, de la, p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Yo, memorias inmemoriales I* (México: Siglo XX I, 1988), p. 378.

<sup>32</sup> King, p. 44.



Figuerola later worked on the two *comedias rancheras*, *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* and *Dos Tipos de Cuidado*.

The music for *Redes* was composed by the classical composer and conductor Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940), who used folk music and revolutionary *corridos* as the inspiration for his compositions, and who occupied a position in Mexican music comparable to Aaron Copland in the United States. A year later, Revueltas was also responsible for the music of the film *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* directed by Fernando de Fuentes, who co-wrote the script with the poet Xavier Villaurrutia. In addition to *Redes*, the government also produced a series of documentaries and newsreels showing the achievements of the Cárdenas regime. During this time, the private sector produced a series of films ranging from melodramas to horror films.

Vega Alfaro and Aurelio de los Reyes both agree that the 1930s saw the development of two opposing aesthetic tendencies in the Mexican cinema, "even though they were both ramifications of so-called cinematic nationalism."<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, there was the liberal nationalism promoted by the Cárdenas regime in films such as *Redes*, *Janitzio*, and *Vámonos con Pancho Villa*. Vega Alfaro explains that these films were influenced by Eisenstein and the musical tendencies of composers such as Manuel Castro Padilla, Revueltas, Manuel M. Ponce and Carlos Chávez.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, there were the conservative and reactionary ideas which had been expressed in silent films such as *Partida Ganada* (1920), *En la Hacienda* (1921), *Viaje Redondo* (1920), *La Parcela* (1922) and *El Caporal* (1921), which linger on into the period of the talkies, exalting the rural world of the Díaz regime, defending the established order and ignoring the social changes brought about by the Revolution. It was these conservative ideas that the supporters of liberal nationalism were trying to counterbalance. Vega Alfaro adds that the conservative nationalism seen in films like *Mano a Mano*, made a reappearance in 1936 with three "folkloric" films, which he claims were influenced by popular theatre, the *costumbrista* novels, nationalistic painting, and especially from popular music in radio programmes.<sup>35</sup> These films are *Cielito Lindo* (dir. Roberto O'Quigley), based on the popular revolutionary song; *¡Ora Ponciano!* (dir. Gabriel Soria) based on the bullfighter Ponciano Díaz; and *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (dir. Fernando de Fuentes).

*Allá en el Rancho Grande*, classified by Vega Alfaro as an example of "conservative nationalism", established the image of the *charro cantor* as an immediately recognizable figure with the actor Tito Guizar: it established the basis for the

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<sup>33</sup>Vega, de la, p. 83.

<sup>34</sup>Idem

<sup>35</sup>Idem



development of the genre later to be known as *comedias rancheras*. This film produced an unexpected national and international success for de Fuentes. It was the first Mexican film to receive an international award (for photography) at the Venice Festival, paradoxically during the Mussolini dictatorship. This film reached a wider audience when it was subtitled and shown in the US. Its box office success established the foundation for a Mexican cinema industry in Latin American markets, even though the film was distributed by an American company. Chapter 5 studies this film in detail. As a brief commentary one can say that because it was directed by Fernando de Fuentes, who also produced three of the best cinematic treatments of the Mexican Revolution, it might have been expected to be a more critical analysis of the movement, rather than a commercial comedy set in the *hacienda*. In 1933, De Fuentes had produced *El prisionero Trece* and *El Compadre Mendoza*. In 1935 for his production of *Vámonos con Pancho Villa*, the government of Lázaro Cárdenas had provided funds for the CLASA studios, and allowed soldiers from the army to participate as extras. This prolific director had made 11 films between 1932-1936 of which *El compadre Mendoza* and *Vámonos con Pancho Villa* received particular acclaim for taking a more analytical view of the Revolution.

The music in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* was under the direction of the composer Manuel Esperón. He is notable as one of the great influences on the development of the *comedias rancheras* and consequently of the *canciones rancheras*. Esperón had begun his career as a composer in 1926 when he joined Lorenzo Barcelata and Ernesto Cortázar to form a group called Tlalixcoyano, which achieved success with the songs *Arroyito* and *Lirio*. This collaboration would be very influential in the creation of the *rancheras*. Esperón worked as a pianist in the silent cinema. In the talkies, he began a successful career in the film industry in 1933 with the composition of the title song, a *bolero*, for Boytler's film *La Mujer del puerto*. Like *Santa*, the theme is of the fallen woman, who, in the words of the song sells "placer a los hombres que vienen del mar...". In *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, the composer Esperón and the lyricist Barcelata worked together in the music and the songs.

In addition to Esperón, the other members of this trio were to help shape the *canción ranchera*. After leaving the group Tlalixcoyano, Barcelata became a member of the Quinteto Tamaulipeco and travelled around Mexico and the United States. Apart from acting and singing in films he also wrote several well-known songs, some of them later became part of the *ranchero* repertoire; *El toro coquito* was written in partnership with Cortázar, for the film *Ora Ponciano* (1936). In 1937 he composed and sang the song *Jalisco nunca pierde* later to be recorded with great success by Jorge Negrete.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>He is also the composer of the song *María Elena* for the film of the same name (1934), which was recorded by Jimmy Dorsey and orchestra in 1941 and sold more than one million copies.



Barcelata died in a car crash in 1943, but during the rest of the decade, the partnership of Esperón and Cortázar produced many of Jorge Negrete's most successful *ranchero* songs. Esperón also wrote songs for Pedro Infante, among them one of the most famous *boleros*, *Amorcito Corazón*.

After the success of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, other producers began to set their films on ranches. In 1937, of the 38 films produced, more than half were what García Riera calls "folklóricas o nacionalistas" in which music was an essential element.<sup>37</sup> Among these are *Las cuatro milpas* (1937) with Barcelata and the comedian from the popular theatre Carlos López *Chaflán*; the film also featured the Trío Calaveras, who would later accompany Negrete in his tours in Cuba and Spain. Barcelata acted in and wrote the title song for the film *Jalisco nunca pierde*, later sung and made famous by Jorge Negrete. The comedian Mario Moreno *Cantinflas* made his debut in *¡Así es mi tierra!* (dir. Arcady Boytler) "a brilliant parody of the Eisenstein cinema", in which the Mariachi Vargas also appeared.<sup>38</sup> A year later, a film was made about *mariachis*, *La Tierra del Mariachi*, in which Lucha Reyes, at the peak of her career, sang the famous song *Sufrimiento* (Armando Rosales). Also in 1938, a year after appearing in his first major film *La Madrina del Diablo*, Negrete, before establishing his reputation as the *charro cantor*; starred in *La Valentina*, based on the well-known revolutionary *corrido*. By the end of the decade, there was a revival of nostalgia for the dictatorship with the film *En tiempos de Don Porfirio* (dir. Juan Bustillo Oro), in which the tenor Emilio Tuero sang *Serenata Mexicana*, also known as *Alevántate*, by the classical composer Manuel M. Ponce. This song would also be later included in the *ranchero* repertoire. It was recorded by Pedro Infante and later featured in the film *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* (1952). Apart from extolling the beauty of the ranch and the "good old days" of the Porfiriato, the film industry also created in this period the image of an ideal tropical world in films like *Hombres de Mar* (1938), in which the song *Vereda Tropical* by the popular composer of the time Gonzalo Curiel was performed by the female singer Lupita Palomera. In 1940, Tito Guizar appeared in the film *Allá en el Trópico* directed by Fernando de Fuentes. This was a break from the *ranchero* repertoire, but enabled him to use his stylish tenor voice to good effect in *A la orilla del Mar*, again composed by Esperón and Cortázar. During this period, film makers, composers and singers, combined to present an idealized image of Mexico with both the earthiness of the *ranchero* and the sensuality of the tropics.

By the end of the decade, with the crisis which followed the nationalization of the oil industry the production of films had decreased from 57 in 1938 to 38 in 1939. The Cárdenas government, in an attempt to protect the film industry, in October 1939 issued

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<sup>37</sup>García Riera, I, p. 140.

<sup>38</sup>Vega, de la, p. 84.



a decree which made it compulsory for all Mexican cinemas to show at least one domestic film each month.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of films shown were American. During the decade of the 1930s, of the 3,081 feature films shown in Mexico City, 2,338 (76%) were from the USA, 544 (17.5%) from other nations and only 199 (6.5%) were Mexican.<sup>40</sup> In the next decade, the Mexican film industry would expand, and, with the consolidation of the “star” system, Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante would become two of the main stars.

#### 4.3 THE DECADES OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE OF THE *CHARRO CANTOR* (1940-1952)

In the 1940s the Mexican cinema industry developed rapidly and the *charro cantor* attained prominence in the *comedias rancheras* and the *ranchera* songs flourished. John King states that the success of the Mexican cinema during this period was due to a number of factors: the increased commercial opportunities offered by WWII; the emergence of a number of important directors and cinematographers; the consolidation of the star system based on proven formulae; the reduction of Hollywood exports and the decline of the Argentine film industry due to US hostility. In addition to this, there was the financial support given to Mexico through the Rockefeller Office. At the same time the Mexican government helped the industry with the creation in 1942 of the Banco Cinematográfico, whose function was to grant loans to film makers and to facilitate distribution. This bank, a private institution, was strongly supported by the Mexican government by means of guarantees offered by the Banco de México (The Official National Bank) to private capital.

With the entry of the US into WWII, the Good Neighbour Policy greatly improved the relationship between the two countries, which had previously been rather strained and “in exchange for military co-operation, inexpensive labour and guaranteed sales of raw materials, Mexico received numerous loans and technological aid to invigorate its shaky economy and to reposition itself in the Latin American, European and even US markets.”<sup>41</sup> In particular, it helped the Mexican film industry to develop during the war years. From the American film industry Mexico received technological advice and raw material such as reel stock. It also enjoyed the benefit of a Spanish speaking market which, for political reasons, was denied to the Spanish and Argentine film industries.<sup>42</sup> In a reversal of the decline of the late 1930’s and early 1940’s the industry made a swift

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<sup>39</sup>Jorge A. Schnitman, *Film Industries in Latin America: Dependency and Development* (New Jersey: Ablex, 1984), p. 41.

<sup>40</sup>Vega, de la, p. 85.

<sup>41</sup>Idem

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 86.



recovery. In 1939, 37 films were made, and this figure declined to 29 in 1940. During the war production increased: 37 films were produced in 1941, 47 in 1942, 70 in 1943 and 75 in 1944.<sup>43</sup>

The Mexican film industry diversified and *comedias rancheras* and family melodramas set in the country and in the city together with other genres experienced a boom. The Mexican “star” system was consolidated. Jorge Negrete became associated with the image of the *charro cantor* after the success of the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* in 1941. His co-star Gloria Marín who became his partner in real life and the cinema for most of this decade came to represent the image of the Mexican middle class beauty. Dolores del Río, directed by Emilio “Indio” Fernández, became the idealized Mexican indigenous female beauty accompanied by the male earthy virility of Pedro Armendariz. The industry and María Félix herself would create the myth of the strong unattainable Mexican beauty after she played Doña Bárbara in the film based on the novel of the same title by the Venezuelan writer Rómulo Galleros. The industry deliberately created a “rival” to the established *charro cantor* in the young singer and actor Pedro Infante. However, the latter diversified his part and apart from his roles as the happy-go-lucky *charro cantor* he became associated with the poor workers living in the *barrios* of Mexico City. His work with the director Ismael Rodríguez is best remembered in the films *Nosotros los pobres* (1947) and the sequel *Ustedes los Ricos* (1948). His co-star Blanca Estela Pavón became part of the Mexican star system of this period which identified her with the poor “noble” housewife of the *barrios*. The comedian Mario Moreno *Cantinflas* with his recreation of the language and humour of the *barrios* also became part of the system as a representative of the *pelado* (the poor but witty inhabitant of the city’s *barrios*).

Unlike in Hollywood, the studios in Mexico were not film companies. Studio buildings and their facilities could be hired by directors, thus a star could be working for one studio or another according to the preference of the director. With the growth of the film industry, there was an increase in the number of studios in Mexico during this period. Pérez Turrent draws attention to the characteristic types of films produced by different studios, claiming that “there is a relationship between the studios and the aesthetic and cinematographic development of Mexican cinema.”<sup>44</sup> He says that without abandoning other genres and types of films, each one of the studios had its own distinct style due to the type of crews. During this period the majority of Mexican films were made in either the CLASA studios (est. 1934) or the Azteca studios (est. 1937). When these two studios were over-burdened with work, México Films (est. 1933) took the films the other two could not accommodate. By the middle of the 1940’s, the increasing

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<sup>43</sup>Tomás Pérez Turrent, “The Studios”, in *Mexican Cinema*, pp. 133-144 (p. 137).

<sup>44</sup>Idem., p. 143.



production of films necessitated the building of more studios.<sup>45</sup> Churubusco, which would become one of the major studios, was built in 1944 by a partnership of the American company RKO Pictures (50%) and the Mexican radio magnate Emilio Azcárraga, owner of the radio station XEW.<sup>46</sup> However, problems within the unions began to affect the industry. In 1945, strikes delayed the opening of Churubusco studios, whose first director was Charles B. Wooran, RKO's representative in Mexico.<sup>47</sup> Once the situation had been resolved, the studio went into "super-production". In its second year, 1946, 20 of the 72 films made that year came from Churubusco.

The problems with the industry's union STIC (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica) increased in 1945 when actors, script writers and directors fought for a union separate from that which represented workers in distribution and exhibition. This turned into a bitter struggle which stopped production for two months with damaging effects for the industry. The government of Ávila Camacho intervened acting as an arbiter. It recognized two unions and established the limits of each one. The already existing STIC (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica) was in charge of the distribution, exhibition and the production of newsreels and shorts only. Feature films went to the new union, STPC (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica) led by actors and directors such as Jorge Negrete, José Moreno Cantinflas, Alejandro Galindo, Roberto Gavaldón and the cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa. According to Pérez Turrent, this decision was to have important consequences for the development of the industry in the late 1950's, a period outside the scope of this research. Other structural changes were put into effect and in 1945 the Latin American distribution of films was taken over by Películas Mexicanas S.A. (PELMEX).

The government of Miguel Alemán Valdés coincided with a decline in film production and in 1947 only 58 films were made and some studios such as the old studio, Mexico Film, were closed. It was in this studio that two very successful films had been made: in 1941 Joselito Rodríguez had filmed *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!*, which made a star of Jorge Negrete; later, in 1947 his brother Ismael had produced one of the most successful films of this decade *Nosotros los pobres*, with Pedro Infante. Serious problems affected the film industry in 1948: there were conflicts between the unions and the owners of the studios; there was an economic crisis with a decrease in agricultural and mineral production and the devaluation of the *peso* by almost 100 per cent. Nevertheless, 81 feature films were produced. After the end of WWII, the American film industry speeded up and regained its market in Mexico and of the 369 films shown in Mexico in 1948, 203 had been made in Hollywood. Nevertheless, this year a series of

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<sup>45</sup>In Mexico the term studio refers to a building which was hired out for filming. Unlike in Hollywood it does not refer to a production company.

<sup>46</sup>Pérez Turrent, p. 138.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 139.



successful films were made: Jorge Negrete appeared in the remake of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, now the unchallenged *charro cantor*. It was made in the Churubusco studios, but the colour was the work of the Cinecolor Laboratories in Hollywood. There were other notable films that year. Pedro Infante, under the direction of Ismael Rodríguez made *Ustedes los Ricos* (1948), the sequel to *Nosotros los Pobres*. Emilio Indio Fernández directed *Pueblerina*, *Maclovía*, and *Salón México*, which celebrated the famous Dance Hall that inspired the music of the American composer Aaron Copland. In 1949, the number of feature films increased to 108, but in spite of this, the industry was beginning to show signs of crisis due to restrictive practices, government censorship and the blocking of new talent.<sup>48</sup>

The Alemán government attempted to re-organize the film industry through tighter legal controls and at the end of 1949 the *Secretaría de Gobernación* published the *Ley de la Industria Cinematográfica*, a law to regulate the production, distribution and exhibition of national and foreign films. This law stated that there should be no less than 50% Mexican feature films (*largo metraje*) shown in Mexican cinemas with the government in charge of authorizing the import and export of films.<sup>49</sup> However, these measures failed to stop the decline of the national film industry, plagued as it was by censorship and the lack of openness to new talent. The critic Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro also blames the distribution monopoly of William Jenkins: “in 1949, the monopoly headed by US magnate William Jenkins, in association with the Mexicans Manuel Espinoza Yglesias (a leading banker), Manuel Alarcón and Maximino Avila Camacho (brother of the ex-president), controlled 80% of the national exhibition sector.”<sup>50</sup> The prominent writer José Revueltas attacked Jenkins’ distribution monopoly in print and was expelled by his union, STPC.<sup>51</sup> Vega Alfaro adds that with this monopoly the production sector was pursuing its own interests at the expense of the Mexican film industry, and that producers such as Gregorio Wallerstein and Raúl de Anda: “combined with Jenkins to provide him with films designed exclusively for the domestic market, since the foreign markets by this time were irredeemably lost. Thus, the stage was set for one of the Mexican cinema’s worst eras.”<sup>52</sup> For this critic these are the reasons for the subsequent decline of the Mexican films industry, however, this period is outside the parameters of this thesis.

The industry continued to decline in the 1950s. RKO’s investment in Churubusco studios was withdrawn and subsequently Churubusco and Azteca merged to form

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<sup>48</sup> Vega, de la, p. 91. For more information on the subject of the Jenkins monopoly see the book by the Mexican director Contreras Torres who is severely critical of this situation. Miguel Contreras Torres, *El libro negro del cine mexicano* (México: without editor, 1960).

<sup>49</sup> *Diario Oficial*, “Ley de la Industria Cinematográfica”, 31 December, 1949.

<sup>50</sup> Vega, de la, p. 91.

<sup>51</sup> Paranaguá, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> Vega, de la, p. 91.



Estudios Churubusco-Azteca. The Alemán government with the *Reglamento de la Ley de la Industria Cinematográfica*, in 1951, took upon itself the right to authorize or forbid the exhibition of Mexican and foreign films.<sup>53</sup> This regulation gave the government immense powers to censor anything which attacked morality and public peace.<sup>54</sup> By this means, the government established censorship with its right to cut and modify films: “Si al examinar una película, la Dirección General de Cinematografía, encuentra que la autorización puede concederse previos algunos cortes o modificaciones en la misma”.<sup>55</sup> It also offered a “free voluntary service” to supervise scripts and adaptations before films were made. In 1952 this law, with some modification, was approved by Congress.

This law did not affect the so called “*cabaretera and rumbera*” films which flourished towards the end of the Alemán regime. Dancers such as Ninón Sevilla and the mambo star Tongolele, scantily dressed and with provocative movements presented a challenge to middle-class morality. Nevertheless, the industry was declining: in 1950, 125 films were made and in 1951, the number had decreased to 101. The government of Alemán ended in 1952, during which year 98 films were produced, among them the *comedia ranchera*, *Dos Tipos de Cuidado*. This film was produced by Tele Voz, a company formed by Jorge Negrete and Miguel Alemán Velasco, the son of President Miguel Alemán Valdés. It was filmed in the studios Churubusco Azteca and on location. It was directed by Ismael Rodríguez and was the only meeting on screen of the so called “rivals” Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante. Negrete was to die a year later and Infante was killed in a plane crash in 1957. Their early deaths contributed to their iconic status. This is by no means the end of the story. A well organized cinema and record industry continued to target the audience of what the Dirección General de Cine called the “público de masas”.<sup>56</sup> José Alfredo Jiménez was soon crowned *El Rey de la Canción Ranchera* and Lola Beltrán, *La Reina*. By this time there was a new medium: in 1950 Raúl Azcárraga and Miguel Alemán Velasco had founded TELEVISA, which was to become one of the biggest television corporations in Latin America and would become a serious contender to the film industry.

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<sup>53</sup>*Diario Oficial*, ‘Reglamento de la Ley de la Industria Cinematográfica’, 6 August 1951, Art. 69. In 1949 the government of Miguel Alemán had passed the *Ley de la Industria Cinematográfica*.

<sup>54</sup>*Idem*

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, Art. 80.

<sup>56</sup> The film director Alejandro Galindo states that a few weeks before the end of the Alemán government, a group of intellectuals wrote to the Dirección General de Cinematografía complaining about the negative influence of the cinema on young people. The reply of this government office was that the audience who went to the cinema were “público de masas” with a low cultural level, thus they required a type of film suited to their tastes. Alejandro Galindo, *Una radiografía histórica del cine mexicano* (México: FCE, 1968), p. 172.





3. Still from *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936). Tito Guizar and Esther Fernández.



## CHAPTER 5. THE TWO FILM VERSIONS OF *ALLÁ EN EL RANCHO GRANDE*: AND THE CINEMATIC CREATION OF THE *CHARRO CANTOR*

Mexico's first national and international box office success, the film *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Over on the Big Ranch), was produced in 1936, with Fernando de Fuentes as director. Twelve years later, in 1948, he remade the film, with less success than the first time, but still managing to produce a hit during one of the troughs in the cycles of the Mexican film industry. Some of the characteristics of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* such as family, recognition and morality were already present in the melodrama of the silent cinema: the setting of the story was in the *hacienda*, the main characters were the *charro*, the *hacendado* and the beautiful *señorita*. According to Vega Alfaro, the plot was similar to the silent film *La Hacienda*: a landowner and his foreman fight for the love of a young *ranchera*.<sup>1</sup> Although the personal relationship is disrupted when Felipe, the *hacendado*, tries to assert his *droit de seigneur* with the betrothed of José Francisco, his foreman, the orphaned Crucita, he comes to his senses and finally, after some misunderstandings, there is a happy ending and the *hacendado* and José Francisco continue with their friendship and celebrate their weddings together.

The elements which also gave *Allá en el Rancho Grande* strength were song and dance. Unlike Hollywood musicals, in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* the songs were introduced in specific situations to complement the narrative and reinforce the role of the main character, the *charro cantor*. The songs were incorporated in specific settings in which music and dance is expected in "real" rural life: the family party in which the *charro* shares the life of the community; the serenade in which the *charro* communicates with his beloved; the fair and the *palenque*, a masculine world where there is danger and perhaps death but also entertainment, and the *cantina* where he and his friends enjoy life but where he also shows his strength. These elements continued to be used by other directors, creating a new cinema genre, the *comedias rancheras* and a new image, the *charro cantor*.

Both versions of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* have the same structure. However, in the second version some songs were left out and others were included reflecting a more organized media industry. The first version was made during the early stages of development of the mass media, thus, apart from the theme song, the other songs in the film were not immediately recorded; they were sold as separate records while in the latter version Negrete recorded them and the songs were released with the film. Many of

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<sup>1</sup>Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, 'Origins, Development and Crisis of the Sound Cinema (1929-64)', in *Mexican Cinema*, ed. by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 79-93 (p. 83).



the songs included in the first version were written by the actor and singer Lorenzo Barcelata with no specific singer in mind. For the second film the already known collaboration of the composer Manuel Esperón and the lyricist Ernesto Cortázar was brought in to adapt and write songs specifically for Negrete. This more commercial approach can be observed in the scenes where the songs were included in both versions of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*. Both versions kept the same settings for the songs: the party on the ranch, the serenade, the *palenque* and the *cantina* where the theme song is followed by the singing duel.

In the first version, in the scene of the serenade Tito Guizar sang *Por ti aprendí a querer*, a song which was soon forgotten. However, in the second version there was more focus on the “star” and Negrete’s already well-known version of *Ojos Tapatíos* was included. Negrete recorded it in 1948 after the release of the film. In the *palenque* scene in the first version the song *Lucha María* (Lorenzo Barcelata), was sung not by the star but by a trio. In the second version, the song *El gallero* was specially written by Esperón and Cortázar and included to provide another solo for Negrete who recorded it in the same year.

In the scene of the *cantina* the two versions kept the successful theme song *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, and the *Coplas de huapango (huapango retachado)* in which the *charro cantor* has a type of verbal duel with his rival Martín. In the first version, Tito Guizar had Lorenzo Barcelata as his rival, in the second version Jorge Negrete had as his opponent the well known singer and actor Luis Pérez Maza. Of the two versions of the theme song *Allá en el Rancho Grande* the one most often played on the radio at the time was that of Tito Guizar, perhaps because a shorter version had already been recorded by Guizar in the US even before the first film had been made. However, the film industry identified the image of the *charro cantor* with Negrete.

Other important changes were the colour and the cast. The first film was in black and white while the second was in colour, even though it was the cheap green-toned system already abandoned by Hollywood. For the second version the entire cast was changed to make the film appeal to a new audience. The first *charro cantor*, Tito Guizar (Federico Arturo Guizar Tolentino), who played José Francisco, the *caporal* (foreman) was replaced by the now established star Jorge Negrete.<sup>2</sup> He was now “El Charro Cantor” and marketed as such. René Cardona the *hacendado* was replaced in the role of Felipe by the younger actor Eduardo Noriega; the orphaned heroine Crucita (Esther Fernández) was now played by Lilia del Valle. The role of Angela, the “evil” housekeeper was played by Lupe Inclán instead of Ema Roldán. Martín, the rival suitor for the hand of

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<sup>2</sup>Tito Guizar was born on April 8th 1908, in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco. He died in San Antonio, Texas, in 1999.



Crucita, was now played by Luis Pérez Meza instead of the actor and composer Lorenzo Barcelata. The comedian Carlos López *Chaflán* (Florentino) was replaced by Armando Soto la Marina *El Chicote*, to mention but a few of the changes. In order to understand why this film established a new genre and was so appealing to the audience, I will first look at the different comments of the critics and then to analyse the songs in the settings of the film: the family party in the two versions of the film, Negrete's serenade *Ojos Tapatíos* and the song *El gallero* in the setting of the *palenque*. In the setting of the *cantina*, I will compare both versions of the theme song followed by the singing duel. In the last section, I will comment briefly on the American Singing Cowboy and Gene Autry's recording of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*.

### 5.1 *ALLÁ EN EL RANCHO GRANDE* (1936) AND THE CRITICS

The success of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* was a surprise for many of the people involved in the production. The cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa recalled years later how: "Había la duda constante de si la música mexicana y el paisaje mexicano iban a tener éxito, pues nos perseguía el famoso complejo de inferioridad. Muchos temían que la película no pegara, y para ellos fue una sorpresa el triunfo delirante que tuvo en todas partes."<sup>3</sup> The director Fernando de Fuentes and Alfonso Sánchez Tello recounted years later how this film relied on a certain amount of luck for its success. They almost begged the impresario of the luxurious Alameda cinema to premier a Mexican film there, at a time when the cinemas showed mostly Hollywood films. However, on the night of its premier on the 6th of October, 1936, before the film was shown, there were acts of various kinds performed as an introduction, but there was a fire in this cinema and the film itself was not shown. After they had refurnished the cinema, the impresario refused to show the film. De Fuentes had no choice but to transfer it to the Balmori, a cinema in the poor *barrios* of the city - which was fortunate - and in a few days it became a triumph.<sup>4</sup>

After the premier of the 1936 film, the majority of critics in Mexico and in the United States praised it. In most of the reviews the words which stand out are "real" and "authentic" to describe the way it represented the people in the countryside, among them the *charros*, and the life on the *ranchos*. Many critics thought that the setting on the *ranchos* gave the actors the opportunity to represent the real *charros* and the people living in the countryside. M. L. Bermúdez in the Mexican sports newspaper *La Afición* liked the way in which the director made the plot work through characters who seemed real:

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<sup>3</sup>Emilio García Riera, *Fernando de Fuentes* (México: Cineteca Nacional 1984), p. 46.

<sup>4</sup>Idem



El argumento, sin grandes exageraciones, desenvolviéndose en un medio fácil y accesible, encontró para ello, con su director, que hizo luciera en toda su magnitud, así como a los personajes, que revivieron cada uno de ellos la figura de la obra, tan reales como si los actores no hubieran salido de aquel medio y fueron exclusivamente llamados a actuar en su propio medio.<sup>5</sup>

However, Bermúdez' on Tito Guizar in his role of the foreman of the *hacienda*, José Francisco, reflected the lukewarm reception given to this actor and singer in the Mexican press, which contrasted with a more favourable reaction by critics in the United States. In the magazine *Vea*, of the 9th of October, 1936, the film critic says that Tito Guizar was used more as a singer than as an actor and his image was not rugged enough for the role: "tiene la cara demasiado inexpresiva y sólo en determinados momentos le da intención y fuerza a su fisonomía."<sup>6</sup> However, he liked the work of René Cardona who played the part of the *hacendado*, Felipe, the comedian *Chaflán* in his role of the good-for-nothing partner of Angela, the housekeeper played by Ema Roldán, and the young actress Esther Fernández in the role of the orphaned Crucita.

For many, the photography by the young Gabriel Figueroa captured the Mexican landscape: "Tanto el ambiente y las fotografías son como arrancadas de un lugar que hayamos visto en alguna parte de nuestra República."<sup>7</sup> Alfonso Icaza in *El Redondel* said that some of the images of the *charro* and the *charrería* reminded him of the pictures of Ernesto Icaza, the nineteenth century painter who specialized in depicting the *charros* and their lives on the *rancho*: "algunos de sus pasajes charros nos recordaron los cuadros de Ernesto Icaza, en tanto que sus escenas íntimas tienen tal sabor local que antójanse familiares."<sup>8</sup>

For the American press the film reflected with realism life on the Mexican *rancho*. In *The New York Times*, Harry T. Smith wrote that: "La acción nunca se estanca, y las muy interesantes escenas de la vida en la gran hacienda actual son ofrecidas con un realismo que no deja nada que desear. Y todo el mundo es feliz al final -algo no tan común en las películas mexicanas."<sup>9</sup> Similar comments had been made earlier by Grah in *Variety*, in New York: "...hay autenticidad en los locales, el vestuario, la caracterización...trata con

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 136-37. 12 October 1936.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 137. This quote is from the newspaper *La Afición*.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 138. This article appears in Spanish in this book.



honestidad y certeza un tema no muy explotado: la vida en el rancho mexicano”.<sup>10</sup>

For many of the critics, the songs and dances featured in the film helped to bring to life the flavour of what was Mexican: “el sabor eminentemente mexicano (aquel huapango tan brillantemente resuelto, la pelea de gallos, las canciones de Barcelata...)”.<sup>11</sup> For Grah this film: “tiene lo mejor en canciones rancheras, así como una buena presentación de las coloridad danzas nacionales...”.<sup>12</sup> This critic was one of the first to describe these songs as *canciones rancheras*, a term which was not specifically used at the time to describe these songs. He added later that the film showed real Mexican horsemanship with “authentic” national customs such as cockfights and Mexican dances: “La película está llena de verdadera equitación mexicana y muestra lo suficiente de una pelea de gallos para dar una idea de ese juego. Se incluye el Jarabe Tapatío, un baile de acción que requiere mucho trabajo de pie y pierna.”<sup>13</sup> The film critic Edga states that the only problem with the film was that Tito Guizar did not sing enough as a soloist, as did the stars in American films. He is also one of the first to point out that the film was not a musical, in the sense used in Hollywood, thus the songs were included only in specific scenes such as the dances.

However, there was one dissenting voice. Luz Alba (Cube Bonifante) in the Mexican newspaper *El Ilustrado* of 15th October, 1936, disagrees with most of the sympathetic critics. For her, the film belongs to the genre of “curiosidades mexicanas”, a product similar to the handicrafts sold to tourists. She argues that: “la interpretación de lo nacional resulta perfectamente falsa y desmayada.”<sup>14</sup> She adds that the film did not interpret Mexican reality but was influenced by the images portrayed in the *teatro de revista* which the people in the city confused with the real life of the countryside: “mexicanismo convencional de nuestro teatro de revistas, que las gentes de las ciudades se han acostumbrado a confundir con el verdadero.”<sup>15</sup> She points out that the scriptwriter Guz Aguila, who had worked for the *teatro de revistas*, just transferred the characters, the setting and the jokes from this theatre to the screen. The main characters: the *charro*, the *hacendado*, the bad woman, the comedy of Chaflán and the “gallego cantinero” came straight from the *teatro de revistas*: “Estos charros de guardarropía, tan pintaditos y tan monos, como el señor Guizar; esas tremendas celestinas tan bobamente inhumanas como la que hace la señora Roldán, ese hacendado tan sin espinazo y tan desescena, como el que interpreta el señor Cardona...no han salido de la vida, sino de las tablas.”<sup>16</sup> For her, the atmosphere of the *rancho* in this film does not portray life in the

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 137. This article appears in Spanish in this book.

<sup>11</sup>Idem

<sup>12</sup>Idem

<sup>13</sup>Idem

<sup>14</sup>Idem

<sup>15</sup>Idem

<sup>16</sup>Idem



real countryside, but is the representation of this life created in the popular theatre of the city, mainly in the companies of the producer and comedian Roberto *El Panzón* Soto:

El ambiente que trasladó al lienzo no le resultó precisamente campestre, ranchero... sino “robertoresco”, desde por las cosas que ocurren en esos ranchos -el “grande” y el “chico- en los que nunca se trabaja, pues las gentes se dedican a beber y a cantar -¡y luego hay quien hable de la dureza del trabajo agrícola! - hasta por la forma en que hablan los campesinos de paga que a ellos llevaron los argumentistas.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, she says that the director Fernando de Fuentes: “en lugar de adelantar en el cine cinematográfico, ha dado un salto atrás hacia el teatro de revistas.”<sup>18</sup> She does not point it out but on September 1930, the Compañía de Revistas Selectas had presented a *revista* called *Allá en el Rancho Grande* in the Politeama theatre. However, it is difficult to know now what was the content of this *revista* as there are no records of this production.<sup>19</sup> Her comments were reflected later by film critics such as Roberto Ayala Blanco and other studies in the 1960’s and 1970’s dealing with the relationship between the media and popular culture. For these critics the cinema as a medium had great possibilities of social and political analysis but instead, directors such as Fernando de Fuentes changed direction and copied popular theatre, repeating an idealized image of the countryside.

As the film critic Hugo Hiriart points out, it was ironic that this film was shot during the government of Cárdenas, whose agrarian policies introduced a series of reforms in the countryside aiming to divide the *hacienda* and hand back the ownership of the land (*pequeña propiedad*) to the *campesinos*.<sup>20</sup> The *hacienda*, a feudal type of land ownership derived from the colonial period, was usually associated with the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, due to the protection and increase of *latifundios* and the exploitation

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<sup>17</sup>Idem

<sup>18</sup>Idem

<sup>19</sup>José de Jesús Nuñez y Domínguez, *Descorriendo el telón: cuarenta años de teatro en México* (Madrid: Rollán, 1956), p. 359.

<sup>20</sup>Land redistribution was one of the main objectives of the Revolution. However, in the post-Revolution period, it was used by the government to control the rural areas. The policy of Agrarian Reform had started during the government of Álvaro Obregón but it continued in the 1930s, especially in the Cárdenas government. This government recognized the demands of the *campesinos* in the Revolution for ownership of the land and implemented the Agrarian Reform which guaranteed the *pequeña propiedad*. However, frequently the land given to the *campesinos* was of poor quality. A more detailed study on this in Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy: A History of the Mexican people* (London: WW Norton, 1992), pp. 398-403.



of the *campesinos*, during his regime.<sup>21</sup> Aurelio de los Reyes points out that *Allá en el Rancho Grande* used clothes, folk customs and songs to hide its implicit conservative criticism of the government's land reform.<sup>22</sup> For Tania Carreño King expresses the view that the film created the stereotype of the *charro*, a character who is presented in the *hacienda*, an idealized rural world with no social or political conflicts: "nos presenta una imagen del campo mexicano alejada de cualquier conflicto social o político."<sup>23</sup> Carreño King adds it is through the songs that the stereotype of the *charro* as a representation of the Mexican is confirmed: "A través de las canciones se reafirman los valores del estereotipo del charro: el nacionalismo- aplicado al reducido universo de la hacienda-, la visión jerarquizada de la sociedad, el honor y el machismo."<sup>24</sup> Yolanda Moreno Rivas and Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro agree with Carreño King that the success of this film was not only due to the combination of national folkloric elements such as cockfights and horse races but also the singing duels and dances.<sup>25</sup> However, as John King points out the importance of the songs in these films was the way they were linked to the narrative: "song became an essential part of national cinema, the sentimental underpinning which linked scenes together and gave greater weight to specific situations."<sup>26</sup> This enables us to analyse the relationship between the film and its audience.

## 5.2 THE SETTING OF SONGS IN THE TWO VERSIONS OF *ALLÁ EN EL RANCHO GRANDE* (1936/1948)

### 5.2.1 LA FIESTA FAMILIAR

In *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, as in many of the *rancheras* which followed, music is essential to the development of the character within the narrative. Songs and dances are used in specific situations which, for the audience, brought a sense of familiarity and a shared reality. Both versions began with a type of introduction. In the first version, the theme song *Allá en el Rancho Grande* is in the background while the old owner of the *rancho*, Don Rosendo, dressed in his *charro* costume, stands at the door of the *rancho*, with his son beside him while the *peones*, dressed in their white cotton clothes return from the fields.

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<sup>21</sup>For further analysis on the development of the *hacienda* see Enrique Florescano, 'The hacienda in New Spain', in *Colonial Spanish America*, ed. by Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 250-285; and François Chevalier, *La formación de los latifundios en México*, 2nd edn (México: FCE, 1985).

<sup>22</sup>Aurelio de los Reyes, *Medio siglo del cine mexicano: 1896-1947* (México: Trillas, 1987), p. 148.

<sup>23</sup>Tania Carreño King, *El charro, la contrucción de un estereotipo nacional: 1920-1940* (México: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 20000), p. 64.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup>Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, 'Origins', (p. 83).

<sup>26</sup>John King, *Magical Reels* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 46.



In the second version, with more experience, the same director Fernando de Fuentes introduced slight changes through which music and dance could be used more effectively. This version begins with the theme song *Allá en el Rancho Grande* playing in the background, a tune immediately recognized by the audience, many of whom would have seen the first version of the film, and were probably singing along with the music. The audience see the outside of the *rancho*, a simple white building set in a landscape with a few trees, and a herd of cows in a field not far away. Meanwhile, a boy, dressed in the white cotton clothes of the poor *campesinos*, riding his donkey approaches the arches of the entrance of the building which bears with pride its name: Rancho Grande. The camera takes us with the boy to where the music is coming from, the patio of the *rancho* where a party is taking place. In this scene, the audience is introduced to the main characters: The old *patrón*, don Rosendo, with his son at his side, is celebrating his birthday with the workers of the *rancho*. The small boy is José Francisco from the nearby Rancho Chico, who is coming to fetch his godmother, the housekeeper Angela, to say farewell to his dying mother. On the one hand, the film could be associated with the *hacienda*. On the other hand, the title song, the lyrics, together with the visual image of the name of the place at the entrance of the building link the narrative to the *rancho*, a term which had a different meaning to the *hacienda*. In popular culture at the end of the nineteenth century the term *rancho* was used for smaller properties, places associated more with the "people". There are some examples in the nineteenth century serials such as *Los Bandidos de Río Frío*, where Doña Pascuala, the owner of a small holding, the ranch of Santa María de la Ladrillera, in a town near the volcanoes, snobbishly reprimands the city dweller when he calls her place a *rancho*, she tells him that her property is big and good enough to be an *hacienda*: "Hacienda, compadre, ya sabe que Moctezuma lo ha vuelto hacienda."<sup>27</sup> After the revolution, the term *hacienda* was associated with the Díaz dictatorship and his protection of latifundios and the abuses of the *hacendados* with their "tiendas de raya", the system in which the *campesinos* were not paid with money but with overpriced goods.

As John King points out, this film portrays a paternalistic feudalism with the honest landowner and noble workers of the period before the Revolution. The party is hosted by Don Rosendo to celebrate his birthday, but the terms people use to address him are: *amo*, *jefe* and *patrón*. The relationship between the owner of Rancho Grande and his workers is more an idealized relationship between the father and his children than the economic relationship of the owner of the ranch and his workers. The dialogue makes this clear. One of the *campesinos* toasts the *hacendado* and thanks him on behalf of the other workers: "asté jefe, por muy ignorante que uno sea no deja de reconocer los favores que le debemos a su paterna y buena persona de usted." The *patrón* replies in the

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<sup>27</sup>Manuel Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío* 2nd. edn (México: Porrúa, 1964), p. 217.



same paternalistic terms, comparing them with his own children but as a father also warns them that they have to behave: “todos aquellos de ustedes que lo merezcan pueden contar con mi apoyo como si fueran mis propios hijos.” When Angela the housekeeper interrupts him to ask for money to bury her *comadre* from Rancho Chico, Don Rosendo turns round and tells his only child Felipe: “con esto ve aprendiendo que el dueño de un rancho tiene que ser para sus propios pobres peones padre, médico, juez y a veces hasta enterrador”. This image of Don Rosendo as a benevolent father figure is re-inforced when he tells the orphan José Francisco that he will help him, as a father, as much as he can, even though he is from another *rancho*. In the dialogue the term he and the others use is *rancho* not *hacienda*, thus the emphasis for the audience is on his role as a father who will take care of his “family”, the term does not imply the abuses of the *hacendados* in the Díaz dictatorship. In the scene, it is the music, the band of *mariachis* without a solo star which re-inforces a sense of a community where the people of the ranch of different status mix and happily celebrate the birthday of the father figure, Don Rosendo. Thus, the music associates this happiness with the life in the *rancho* not the *hacienda*. *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and the *comedias rancheras* that followed deal with the family and the cycle of life: the film begins with a party celebrating a birthday plus the announcement of a death and ends with weddings, as occurred in many of the melodramas in the *folletines*. The structure of the paternal family is re-created as a social structure which offers protection to the people, bearing in mind the lack of strong social institutions in Mexico at the time represented in the film. Felipe, one of the main characters, as in many of the serials, is an orphan, thus there is the need for a father figure. The seriousness of the scenes are lightened by the introduction of comedy with the characters of the *borrachín* Florentino, the partner of Angela, the “evil woman” who tries to sell Crucita to the *patrón*. In later *comedias rancheras*, more comedy and parody of the *charro* were introduced and the good-for-nothing was made a companion to the *charro*. The liveliness of the music re-inforces this sense of fun and happiness.

A technique frequently used by De Fuentes to change from one scene to another to show the passing of time was to repeat the same situation with clues to give the impression of the passing of time. In this case, the audience see two children: Felipe the son of the *hacendado* and the orphan José Francisco playing at “*haciendita*”, a game of role play, imitating the adults. Felipe takes the role of his father, el *patrón* sitting behind his desk giving instructions to José Francisco who takes the role of the foreman. The camera focuses on the hands of the child writing at the desk; after a cut the audience see the hands of an adult and then the camera tilts up to show both characters but now as adults. They are now playing their real roles in life. Felipe behind the desk looks at the picture of Don Rosendo and tells José Francisco, that he will be as good as his late father and he will begin by fulfilling one of his wishes to give the job of foreman to José



Francisco, and symbolically hands him some papers. To show that the relationship of friendship has not changed with their new roles, Felipe asks his new foreman to get ready to accompany him to the nearby town to serenade his girlfriend and to visit the town's fair. With this scene De Fuentes passes from the introduction to the main story of the film and links the narrative to the scene of the serenade.

### 5.2.2 THE SERENADE

The serenade is used in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* to feature the main singer and to bring romance to the narrative and to portray the *charro* as a tender lover. However, the serenade was an influence from serials and popular theatre. In the nineteenth century the serials and popular theatre recreated the serenade which, with its Spanish origin, became part of the ritual of courtship in Mexico and one of the ways in which the suitor could communicate his feelings. The serenade, usually sung in the evening by the lover to his beloved during courtship, was included in the repertoire of the *charro*; thus it became associated with the *comedias rancheras* and the repertoire of the *canciones rancheras*. In the films, the serenade was an excellent vehicle to introduce and develop the theme of love and romance. With the setting - the girl behind the grilles of the balcony/window listening to her lover singing outside - the cinema conveyed a quality of love, romance and intimacy with the audience in contrast with other *ranchera* songs, which were designed for dancing or to be listened to at a fair or a party. Many *ranchero* films from *¡Allá en el Rancho Grande!* to *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* included a scene with a serenade.

In *Allá en el Rancho Grande* the serenade gave the producers the opportunity to give the *charro* a central role to engage the audience, just as popular theatre had previously done as previously mentioned. In popular theatre, the serenade provided the opportunity for the impresarios of the *tandas* and *revistas* to present it as a solo act, in which an actor or singer could attract the public. As an act independent from the others, the impresarios charged only for each *tandas* (turns), making this a very profitable business. This allowed the poorer sectors of society to afford at least one solo act, by only paying to see this one act. The serenade within the film is a solo act which allows the limelight to focus on the star. However, in the first version of this film the producers were still learning and, as one American film critic pointed out, there were not many memorable songs. Tito Guizar did not receive the star-treatment of the American films, where he would have been constantly in the spot-light and given more impresseure to magnify his image. Tito Guizar in his role of the foreman José Francisco shares the limelight with the *patrón* played by the experienced actor of *zarzuelas* and popular theatre, René Cardona. Tito Guizar is clean shaven, with neatly cut hair and has an air of innocence.



On the other hand, the *patrón* has a moustache which gives him an air of maturity, virility and machismo. The song *Por tí aprendí a querer*, a waltz by Lorenzo Barcelata (copyright in 1934), was used in both versions but it did not last in the *ranchero* repertoire. The emphasis changed in the next decade, when Jorge Negrete took over the role of the *charro cantor*. The star system had developed and more songs were specially included to make the most of his fame. In the second version, the “star” Jorge Negrete is the centre of attention and his previous hit *Ojos Tapatíos*, one of the most famous serenades, is included.

At the peak of his career, in 1944, Jorge Negrete, accompanied by the Trío Calaveras, sang *Ojos Tapatíos* during his tour of Cuba, and it immediately became a success. The styles of singing of José Limón, who sang the song in the theatre, and Negrete reflect the periods in which the song was sung. The Limón recording demonstrates the use of the classically trained operatic voice with the kind of projection required in an unamplified theatre and for acoustic recording. The Limón interpretation gives us a “volcanic eruption” of emotion in a style established by Enrico Caruso.<sup>28</sup> His version is shorter than Negrete’s, but the repetition with slight changes of the words of the last verse takes the listener with him to an emotional climax finishing on a high note. The Negrete recorded version, while still largely operatic in style, shows the more relaxed type of voice-production allowed by the microphone. The electric recording also enables the singer to achieve greater intimacy. Limón sings to an audience, while Negrete appears to sing individually to a woman, an image which is supported by the visual aid of the cinema.

There are three separate versions of this song by Negrete. The first one was recorded during his tour of Cuba in 1944; the other two in 1948, one in the film *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, and then a studio version. For the average listener there are few differences in the recordings. In the recording of this song in Cuba, Negrete was backed by the singers and the accompaniment was only with guitars, producing a sense of nostalgia in the song. In the film and the studio recording, Negrete sings on his own and is backed by an orchestra. In the last two versions Jorge Negrete was already a star and the scene in the film and the recording try to make the most of his fame. The scene of the serenade is an opportunity for the star to shine. In this scene the camera goes from a long shot with Negrete in the centre, the band of *mariachis* at the back and in front of the stoned paved street, under bright moonlight with the *patrón* standing outside the grille of the window. During the song the camera moves to a medium shot and close up of Negrete, creating a sense of intimacy with the audience. The attention is on the singer, which allows the audience to concentrate on the image of the *charro* complemented by the lyrics. There is time for the audience to listen to the words which

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<sup>28</sup>*El aís de las Tandas: Cachitos de México*. LP. México. INSEN. 1987



Negrete delivers with emotion. The camera as the eye of the audience is on the star. Negrete looks at the window, but his gaze is on the camera: thus he is looking at the audience. This dramatization of love through a play of glances and the identification of the audience is reinforced by the images of the gaze in the lyrics of the song.

In the darkness of the cinema this is an individual identification of dreams and desires. The combination of images of the loving eyes in the film, the interpretation of the lyrics with their long vowels, reinforced by the melody produces tension and release. They dramatize what love and romance should be and how it should be expressed. They also teach the audience how it should be received. This combination produces a certain eroticism.

No hay ojos más lindos, en la tierra mía,  
que los ojos negros de la tapatía,  
miradas que matan, ardientes pupilas,  
noche cuando duerme, luz cuando nos miran.

A type of suspense is created by the lyrics describing the setting of the narrative, complemented by the images in the film of a serenade under the moon, outside the balcony with bars to protect the “innocence” of the woman, and leaving to the imagination of the audience the emotions of the girl hidden behind the window. In the Limón version the last sentence was made personal, the beloved was waiting for him “la novia *me* espera, temblando de amores”, while in Negrete’s version the sentence was made impersonal, substituting the “me” for “que”, making each of the women in the cinema feel the song is for them:

En noche de luna, perfume de azahares,  
en el cielo estrellas y tibios los aires,  
tras de la reja, cubierta de flores,  
la novia *que* espera, temblando de amores, sí.

It is only at the end of the song that the girl opens the window. In the Negrete version De Fuentes gives a modern touch with a kiss through the grille between the *patrón* and his girlfriend. In a note of humour the camera moves to Negrete, who mischievously looks at the camera and thus the audience, and with a gesture of complicity lowers his hat covering the scene.



The use of this song in a more structured media industry exploits of contemporary popularity of the singer on the radio, and the record industries which also supply discs for the jukeboxes in *tiendas*, *cantinas* and *pulquerías*. In the early stages of his career Negrete did not make records of the songs of his films immediately. His popularity was based on films and personal presentations on the radio and theatres. In 1948, he recorded several of his songs, among them *Ojos Tapatíos*, thus competing more commercially with other singers such as Pedro Infante.

In the serenade scene the *mariachi* band is in the background miming to the music as if they are playing while Negrete is singing. In the soundtrack though Negrete is in fact accompanied by an orchestra, in which the sound of the harp and the violins emphasises the theme of love with romantic chords. On the screen, the *mariachi* band is made up of violins, a harp, a guitar, a *guitarrón* and a trumpet. However, the trumpet which was later the leader in the *mariachi* band and the *rancheras* is visually linked with the *mariachi* band but is not included in the orchestral accompaniment to this song. The trumpet was usually linked with military marches, the open air and bullfights, so there was no reason to include this instrument in a love song like the serenade. Nevertheless, the visual image included the trumpet in the *mariachi* band in a period of transition between the old *ranchero* style of singing, semi-operatic and accompanied by orchestras, and the more commercial *ranchero* style from the 1950's of composers such as José Alfredo Jiménez.

### 5.2.3 EL PALENQUE

After the scene of the serenade, the narrative of the film takes us in a natural sequence, to the next day with the adventures of the *charro* José Francisco and the *patrón* Felipe in the fair and its *palenque*. The *palenques* were an important part of rural entertainment dating back to the commercial fairs of nineteenth century Mexico. The first *palenque* built in 1736 allowed a legal regulated form of gambling, which provided revenue to the Crown.<sup>29</sup> They survived and still offered a form of gambling and entertainment in the countryside and the outskirts of Mexico City at the time when the two versions of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* were being made. The *palenques* offered not only cockfights but also music and dance between the bouts to alleviate the tension and to encourage the public to bet on the result. In Chapter 6, I will deal briefly with the influence of the *cantadoras*, travelling singers who appeared on these places, on the *ranchero* singer Lucha Reyes.

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<sup>29</sup> Antonio García Cubas, *El libro de mis recuerdos*, 7th edn (México: Patria, 1978), p. 353.



The writers of the serials used the *palenques* as a setting for popular entertainment, as did the theatre. In *Allá en en Rancho Grande*, the *palenque*, like the serenade, provides the *charro* with an opportunity to make a strong impression on the audience with his singing and at the same time enables the narrative to move forward. José Francisco, the foreman and his boss and friend Felipe arrive at the *palenque* with the cockerel which was to fight with that of another *ranchero*. The entertainment begins the *Jarabe Tapatío*, danced by two couples. Both versions feature the Mexican national dance. In the first version one of the dancers was Emilio Fernández who would become one of the best known directors of the “golden years” of the Mexican cinema. The dancers lacked the polished choreography of the Hollywood films where every step was synchronized. This however, gives a sense of “authenticity” to the Mexican films.

The action of the film continues with a scene of the two friends standing among the audience enjoying the dance and later the performance of a trio in *charro* costumes with guitars singing *Lucha María*, as entertainment for both the spectators in the *palenque* and the cinema audience. In the second version, this is followed by a new song, *El Gallero* specially written for Negrete by Esperón and Cortázar : this takes the form of a “special request” from the trio to José Francisco, which he is at first reluctant to sing as he is busy preparing his entrant for the cockfight. However, Negrete joins the trio in this song, all four wearing *charro* costumes.

The song extols the life of the man who owns and bets on fighting cocks and is thus a comment on the scene in the film.

A la arena del palenque  
traigo un gallo retador  
que hoy se siente más valiente  
porque traí su amarrador

que le salga el que contra  
pues ya le anda por pelear  
este gallo arisco y pronto  
pide sangre en su cantar

The orchestral accompaniment of sweeping strings and dynamic rhythm, characteristic of Esperón compositions, creates an atmosphere of excitement and adventure which complements the virility of Negrete’s ringing voice. The soloist is presented in heroic mode. The drums create a martial atmosphere emphasizing death and danger in the



*palenques*. At the same time the *mariachis'* harmony adds an air of conviviality and comradeship which continues with the interchange between the star Negrete and the total effect it that the audience in the cinema become one with the spectators in the *palenque* and share their feeling of exhilaration.

Está brava por ser pendenciera  
ahí el miedo nunca entró  
de mi pueblo serás compañera  
por tu alarde y tu valor

tanto quiero allá en la gallera  
y en la arena una canción  
un ranchero de voz altanera  
saca de su corazón

...

Una vaca de oro y plata  
lo pelea su amarrador  
y le ha puesto en cada pata  
su dinero sin temor

A su gallo va jugando  
alma vida y corazón  
y apostando a Rancho Grande  
da tronchada esta ocasión

The songs and dance offer relief from the danger of the place where one bird will win by killing its opponent, and where political and social conflicts often come out into the open. However, the lyrics of the song make no reference to the antagonism in the film between Felipe, the owner of the Rancho Grande, and his opponent, a *ranchero* from the nearby town of Real Minero. The action continues when this man, manifestly from a lower social class than Felipe, accuses him of cheating, of trying to switch roosters at the last moment. Felipe stands up to defend his word and honour but his opponent calls him and his companions, “puros capitalistas, explotadores”. Felipe’s friend, the “gringo” Pete, comes to his rescue but is jostled aside by the *ranchero* who breaches the code of honour and fires his pistol at the unarmed Felipe. In the nick of time José Francisco steps in front of his friend and *patrón* and saves his life. Later, in true melodramatic fashion,



Felipe offers a blood transfusion to the foreman: his life is saved, and the *patrón's* generous action makes them blood brothers. We are not told what happens to the assailant.

#### 5.2.4 LAS CANTINAS AND LAS PULQUERIAS AND THE SINGING DUEL

The story continues when José Francisco recovers from his wounds. He enters a race in another town for which Felipe lends him his best horse. After winning the race, the men of the town go to the *cantina* to welcome the victor and to celebrate his triumph. This was one of the first films to set the action in the *cantinas*, an enclosed space where the film could make the *charro* interact with his fellow-men, although women and children were not allowed in the *cantinas*. This was also an ideal place to introduce the music in a realistic situation, as popular theatre had done earlier and as had been described in the serials. For the cinema audience the *cantina* would have resembled the contemporary *pulquería*. The *pulquerías* are a type of tavern dating back to the colonial period, where, poor people of both sexes went to eat, entertain themselves with cheap drink, *pulque* and to bet on cockfights, with music and dance playing an important part.<sup>30</sup> By the time of the film's production the *cantinas* and the *pulquerías* were virtually indistinguishable, the only difference being that the former sold spirits and the latter sold *pulque* (an alcoholic drink made from maguey, not as strong as tequila, but intoxicating if drunk in quantity). Neither of the two accepted women at this time. Both places had music from travelling bands and *mariachis*.

The song *Allá en el rancho Grande* recreates the entertainment in the *cantina* and helps to move the development of the narrative in the film forward and leads to the climax of the story. In the *cantina* owned by the *gallego* Don Venancio (this is a character taken from popular theatre), to everyone's surprise, José Francisco announces that he is going to marry the orphaned Crucita. He is unaware that during his absence a rumour has emerged casting doubt on her honour: two of the workers from the ranch have seen her leaving the house of Felipe late the previous night. In this scene two of the characteristics of melodrama are at work in building up the story: recognition and suspense. The cinema audience know the truth; nothing has happened between Crucita and the *hacendado*. The suspense increases: the townspeople are certain that Crucita has been dishonoured; José Francisco knows nothing about the rumour and his song expresses his happiness at being able to marry with the money he has won on the race.

This song takes its rhythm from the galloping horse. It has the lighthearted optimism of

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<sup>30</sup>Carlos Monsiváis, '¿A quién quiere dedicarle esa bonita melodía?', in *La música popular en México: ¿Qué onda con la música popular mexicana?* (México: SEP, 1983), pp. 11-28 (p. 11).



the open air atmosphere, emphasized by the falsetto yells. In the cinema, the humorous questions and comments of the townsfolk create the festive atmosphere of rural life with its companionship and jollity. The close harmony of the singer reflects this friendship. The song repeats the word *rancho*; the people who live there are the *rancherita* and the *ranchero*.

Allá en el Rancho Grande  
allá donde vivía (falsetto yells)  
había una rancherita  
que alegre me decía  
que alegre me decía

¿Qué te decía manito?  
te voy a'cer tus calzones

¿cómo?  
como los que usa el ranchero

¿seguro?  
te los comienzo de lana,

¿y luego?  
te los termino de cuero

Allá en el rancho grande,  
allá donde vivía,  
había una linda rancherita  
que alegre me decía

The song follows the structure of a *corrido* with a brief introduction establishing the setting, El Rancho Grande: this links the narrative in the film with that of the song. Within the context of the film, the antiphonal nature of the song is self-explanatory. It helps to create the convivial atmosphere of the *cantina*, where everyone joins in. When the song is heard outside the context of the film, the significance of the dialogue is lost, but the happy atmosphere of the idealized rural life remains.

¿pos que te decía manito,  
pasen pa'dentro que estoy vivito?



es gusto de un buen ranchero

¿cuál?

tener su buen caballo

pasearlo por la mañana

¿y luego?

darle la vuelta al vallado

Allá....repeat the first verse.

Guizar, the star of the first film, was a pure lyric tenor and his treatment of the melody is sensitive with a particularly subtle use of *diminuendo*. His singing conveys enthusiasm, youth and innocence, which makes the drama of the film credible. This fits well with an early image of the *charro* as a young hero who obeys the code of honour. However, by the time the second version was filmed, the image has changed: Negrete's *charro* is a mature man who had less the qualities of a hero than those of the avenger.

When the song has ended, the tension builds up with the audience waiting to see how the young foreman will react when he hears the rumour about the woman to whom he has become betrothed in secret. The men in the *cantina* challenge the foreman to sing a *huapango retachado* (duel in song) with his rival Martín. The look of recognition among the drinkers marks their complicity with the audience who are aware that a fight will ensue. The *huapango retachado* is a sort of musical dialogue in which two singers improvise verses which they sing alternately. The lyrics take the plot forward by confronting José Francisco with Martín who is envious of the hero's position as foreman and jealous of his success in the race and with Crucita.

The two "contenders" compose their verses, to a guitar accompaniment, each trying to outdo the other in witty taunts. José Francisco begins, telling the world how proud he is to be from El Rancho Grande. He boasts of his skills as a horseman and with a hint of sexual innuendo, brags that he can tame any skittish filly - all this to his vanquished rival in love. His verse ends with a tongue-in-cheek popular saying which pays tribute to the *charro*.

Soy charro de Rancho Grande

y hasta el amor bebo en jarro

Soy charro de Rancho Grande



y hasta el amor bebo en jarro

Y no hay potranca matrera  
que me tumbe si me agarro  
Ay que Dios tan pantera  
cuando se viste de charro

Martín replies that he was born and bred in El Rancho Grande, and makes spiteful reference to the fact that the other is an orphan who was born elsewhere.

Yo en Rancho Grande nací  
y nunca lo ando diciendo  
Yo en Rancho Grande nací  
y nunca lo ando diciendo

Hay quienes no son de aquí  
y nomás van presumiendo  
como uno que conocí  
y que sigo conociendo

In his next verse, José Francisco rubs salt into Martín's wounds, singing that "someone" is sore because he did not become foreman and lost both the horserace and the girl. The other men in the *cantina* watch with apprehension as the two men vie with one another in insults:

hay uno que en el cantar  
da su envidia a conocer  
da su envidia a conocer  
hay uno que en el cantar

porque no fue caporal  
ni lo quiso una mujer  
corrió el Palomo tan mal  
que al patrón hizo perder



In revenge, Martín insinuates that José Francisco has procured Crucita for his *patrón* as recompense for the loan of his horse.

vale más saber perder  
y guardar en el honor  
con la mujer que uno quiere  
no hay que hacer combinación

si pierdo, revancha tomo  
y a la cruz de mi pasión  
por un caballo Palomo  
no se la cambio al patrón

The audience in the cinema like the spectators anxiously await José Francisco's reaction: will he draw his gun and shoot Martín? The song ends abruptly, and José Francisco confronts Martín: "Eso que me acabas de decir en verso, me lo vas a sostener en prosa y ahora mismo". Martín calls on the ranch watchmen to bear witness that they have seen Crucita leaving Felipe's house late the previous night. Now, José Francisco's honour is at stake, not just the woman's virtue. The *charro* proceeds to the house of the *patrón* to avenge this slur on his character accompanied by the drinkers of the *cantina* and sundry townsfolk. The tension builds up as Felipe waits outside the house. Crucita comes into the scene and announces to the whole town that nothing has occurred between Felipe and herself. José Francisco does not believe her. Then Felipe confirms that Crucita has been telling the truth and that she is blameless. It is apparent that the word of a man is more to be trusted than the word of a woman. The element of recognition has been at work in this situation: the audience in the cinema have been aware of the truth for some time, unlike the townspeople. The real culprit was the washer-woman, Angela: she tricked Crucita into accompanying her to the *patrón's* house late at night and, using the pretext of feeling unwell, left them alone together. Angela confesses that she had offered to procure Crucita for the *patrón* for one hundred pesos. We all see that Crucita is innocent: she was unaware of the plot and managed to escape with her honour intact due to a timely attack of asthma and Felipe's realization that she had been tricked by the "evil" washer-woman. The story concludes on a note of comedy as Angela is "punished" by marriage to the drunken Florentino, who promises to take her in hand and assert his authority.

The character of Florentino is based on the good-for-nothing type in the *revista*. The actor Carlos López *Chaflán* who played this role in the first version of the film was a



well known comedian in the *revistas* of Mexico City. His humour and comic misuse of language parodies the rural dweller in the City and derives from popular theatre as does his costume and his boozing. In the *comedias rancheras* which were to follow, especially in the films of Jorge Negrete, more comedy and parody was included and this character became the companion and foil to the *charro*. This was a style of partnership which goes back to Don Quijote and Sancho Panza and was only interrupted when in films such as *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* the two *charros* were placed on an equal footing.

As in the melodramas of the *folletines*, the film ends with a wedding, or rather four weddings on the same day, at the same hour in the same place: José Francisco marries Crucita; Nabor a minor character and Eulalia, the sister of José Francisco, also get married; Felipe, the *patrón* marries Margarita whom José Francisco once serenaded on his behalf; and Florentino marries the now repentant Angela. As all the couples come out of the church the bells ring and the theme song is played in the background. The four weddings of people of different social classes create the atmosphere of a community to which everybody belongs. The wedding is a symbol of the importance of each person's individual history; it is one of the rituals which unite those personal histories in a collective social imagination.

### 5.3 THE SINGING COWBOY AND THE SONG *ALLÁ EN EL RANCHO GRANDE*

The success of the film *Allá en el Rancho Grande* beyond the borders of Mexico led to the continued popularity of the theme song, initially in the recording by Tito Guizar and later in an English version by the Singing Cowboy, Gene Autry, who along with Roy Rogers presented a recognizable image which offers points of similarity with the *charro cantor*, but also contrasting features due to the different popular cultures from which they developed. Monsiváis, Ayala Blanco and King, concur in saying that at one level the *charro cantor* was itself a reworking of the Singing Cowboy of Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. However, King and Monsiváis go on to say that at another level the *charro cantor* drew on Mexican popular culture.<sup>31</sup> As previously stated, the *comedias rancheras* were influenced by characteristics dating back to nineteenth century *folletines* and *novelas por entrega*, popular theatre and *corridos*. The Singing Cowboy, on the other hand, bore the influence of American popular culture "stage melodrama, Wild West Shows, dime novels and the Rodeos".<sup>32</sup> The Singing Cowboy and the *charro cantor* had certain features in common: they both offered memories of a rural past in societies on the move and they were also used as patriotic symbols in different societies which is material

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<sup>31</sup>King, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup>Ann Lloyd., ed. *The History of the Movies* (London: Macdonald Orbis, 1988), p. 61.



for another study. In this section I will outline the careers of Gene Autry and Roy Rogers and compare the visual image which they presented with that of the *charro cantor*. Then I will go on to analyse the way this image is complemented by the singing style in Autry's recording of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*.

Gene Autry (1907-1992) was born in Tioga, Texas.<sup>33</sup> He made B Movies for Republic, a studio from what was known as "Poverty Row". He began his career in the early 1930s. Due to a contractual dispute between the star and the studios in 1938 Republic brought in Rogers as his replacement. However, Autry's career continued as a radio and recording star and extended into the age of television. Roy Rogers (1911-1998) was born Leonard Slye in Cincinnati, Ohio.<sup>34</sup> He was already a famous singer with the group Sons of the Pioneers. Both Autry and Rogers were clean shaven, with neat haircuts and dressed in smart and sometimes elaborate Western outfits, and wore the conventional white hat which represented the "good guy". For instance, in many of Rogers' films, he plays an undercover Federal Agent who helps to catch the "bad guy" in the town, he represents Law and Order. This image was all important in Hollywood Westerns, where convention dictated that the villain should wear a black hat and be unshaven. There were other recognizable character types such as the shady businessman who wore a dark suit and had a moustache. South of the Border, in the first version of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936), Tito Guizar is clean-shaven with shortish hair and wears the rural clothes of the time; he has the sensitive, matinee idol good looks of the period. By the 1940s the representation of the *charro* had changed; both Negrete and Infante sport moustaches and have longish hair. Negrete is not a bandit but he is an avenger who is prepared to transgress if necessary and his voice is a resonant baritone which complements his rugged image. Neither Autry nor Rogers could be described as 'rugged' and their recordings call to mind a 'gentler' image.

Autry's version of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* is intended for a different audience and, influenced by the popular culture of the Western film, introduces two English verses with stock phrases describing typical images from cowboy films, such as "ropin", "tyin" and "herdin" with careless grammar and pronunciation to represent rural speech. The

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<sup>33</sup>Gene Autry, Alan Cackett. PLS CD 356. Gene Autry started as a singer in the early 1930's. He made his screen debut in a small part in the film *In Old Santa Fe*, in 1934. By 1936 he had achieved stardom. He made 95 films and 635 records of which 200 were of songs he had written himself. In the 1950s, he appeared on television in addition to his radio broadcasts. He is always associated with Champion the Wonder Horse.

<sup>34</sup>Roy Rogers: *Ride Ranger Ride*. ABMMCD 1276. Roy Rogers got his big break when, owing to a contractual dispute between Autry and Republic, the studios were looking for a new leading man. An accomplished horseman and pistol-shooter, he was already a famous singer with the group Sons of the Pioneers. In 1938 his first starring film, *Under Western Stars*, was a great success. He performed his own stunts including spectacular leaps into the saddle of his horse, Trigger. He made over 90 films, frequently broadcast on the radio and was a prolific recording artist. He also made the transition to television with great success. In many of his films, the love interest was Dale Evans, who became his wife.



emphasis in the English verses is on escape to a mythical Wild West of long ago, where buffalo roam, a lonely life away from the stress of the city. Autry turns the falsetto *mariachi* cry into a Cowboy's yodel. While in the Mexican version the song is a kind of dialogue in which the singer's companions make comments, Autry's version is a solo effort, perhaps to indicate the solitary life of the cowboy and the freedom of the open plains.

I'd love to roam out yonder  
Out where the buffalo wander.  
Free as the eagle flyin',  
I'm a-ropin' and a-tyin',  
I'm a-ropin' and a-tyin'.

Give me my ranch and my cattle,  
Far from the great city's rattle.  
Give me a big herd to battle,  
For I just love herdin' cattle.

The Spanish verses in the Guizar version which were already familiar in the US were retained. However, the interpretation of the song is different. The energetic, operatic treatment of both Guizar and Negrete contrasts with the relaxed, laid-back performance of the crooning baritone Gene Autry, which is in keeping with his visual image. The song is taken more slowly with a simpler guitar accompaniments together with the use of strings in the style now known as Country and Western. Guizar uses a typically Mexican descant at one point; Autry does not, having come from a different musical tradition. Sometimes Autry deliberately sings off key to make the song sound more casual.

Allá en el Rancho Grande  
allá donde vivía,  
había una rancherita,  
que alegre me decía,  
que alegre me decía,  
  
te voy a hacer tus calzones,  
como los qui'usa el ranchero



te los acabo de cuero,  
te los acabo de cuero.<sup>35</sup>

In some of the songs of Roy Rogers the Mexican influence can also be detected for example *On the Old Spanish Trail* which is in the style of a sentimental Mexican love-song. The song tells a nostalgic story of lost love. It is melodiously sung and the Mexican flavour is introduced with a refrain “pardon me if I sigh/ ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay”. There is also a reference to the Mexican *cantina* here presented as a romantic rendezvous. Unlike the *canción ranchera* there is no evidence of passion in Rogers. The song is dreamy and nostalgic, wistful rather than tragic. The musician and critic Peter Dempsey says that the song legacy of the the Singing Cowboy “cheerfully immortalizes the happy-go-lucky, tuneful escapism of vast deserts and Western skies.”<sup>36</sup> These two songs illustrate an area of mediation between two distinct cultures which present contrasting images of ostensibly similar character-types.

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<sup>35</sup>In the early 1950s, Dean Martin also recorded this song. Martin gives it the Big Band treatment with a very clever arrangement. There is an interesting use of guitar, creating a Mexican atmosphere familiar from countless movies, and some use of counterpoint. The use of the trumpet is more jazzy than Mexican. The rhythm is accentuated by the ‘coconut’ sound of horses’ hooves. There is also a snatch of the Mexican *corrido* *La Cucaracha*. The number closes with a Hollywood-style celestial choir and falsetto yells. He performs the song in his own characteristic manner, with no attempt at the country style and “herd” and “herdin” are pronounced “hoid” and “hoidin” in a Brooklyn accent. He only sings the main verse in Spanish.

<sup>36</sup>Roy Rogers, *Along the Navajo Trail*, Peter Dempsey. NAXOS 8.120542







## CHAPTER 6. THE FILM *¡AY JALISCO NO TE RAJES!* AND JORGE NEGRETE *EL CHARRO CANTOR*

From its first performance in the Olimpia cinema in Mexico City on the 12th of November 1941, the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* (Ay Jalisco don't let them beat you!) was a financial success comparable to the 1936 film *Allá en el Rancho Grande*.<sup>1</sup> The *Cinema Reporter*, 20th December, 1941 gave a very positive review: "Llega muy oportunamente esta película de charros y chinas", it reminded the reviewer of the rural films *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and *Ora Ponciano* but without copying them. He liked the music and rightly predicted that "tiene todos los requisitos necesarios para hacerse popular."<sup>2</sup>

Although the actor Jorge Negrete had appeared since 1937 in nine Mexican films and one short Hollywood musical, it was this film which made him a star in the Spanish-speaking world. In his previous films he had appeared in a range of roles such as that of a Villista revolutionary in *La Valentina* (dir. Martín de Lucenay, 1938) where he sang the *corrido* of the same name. In the film *Caminos de Ayer* (dir. Quirino Michelena, 1938) he played the irresponsible Roberto and sang *Guadalajara*, a song which would later be added to his *ranchero* repertoire.<sup>3</sup> In *Perjura* (dir. Raphael J. Sevilla, 1938, the script written by the critic Salvador Novo), he plays a rich upper class heir and he sings the theme song of the same name and another song, *Las Violetas* (Miguel Lerdo de Tejada). He even played the part of a rhumba dancer in the American short musical *Rhumba Rhythm* during his contract with Hollywood (Fox). However, it was his role as a *charro* and his performance of the theme song in the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* which made him, at the age of 30, a star and put a face to the image of the *charro cantor*. That year the Mexican film industry re-created two powerful images from popular culture: the rural inhabitant was represented by Jorge Negrete in his role of *charro cantor* and Antonio Moreno *Cantinflas* appeared as the *peladito*, the cheerful cocky slum-dweller of Mexico City.<sup>4</sup>

The director Joselito Rodríguez took advantage of the reorganization of the production companies in the film industry and the support which the State was prepared to give. This was at a time when it was made compulsory for a quota of Mexican films to be shown in cinemas throughout the country. He formed a new production company,

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<sup>1</sup>Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano: época sonora*, 9 vols (México: Nueva Imagen, 1982), IV, p. 10. A personal translation of the film's title.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>In the film *Fun in Acapulco* (1963), Elvis Presley sang this song wearing a *charro* costume in Acapulco.

<sup>4</sup>*Cantinflas* appeared in two films *Ni sangre ni arena* and *El gerdarme desconocido* produced by the new company Posa Film (Santiago Reachí and Jacques Gelman). These two films are now considered two of his best films.



Rodríguez Hermanos with his brothers and made his debut with *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* He, together with two other young directors Emilio “Indio” Fernández and Julio Bracho, began a new phase of the film industry: the “Golden Years” of the Mexican cinema. At this time the USA was involved in WWII. This was the time when the Banco Cinematográfico began to develop, with funds backed by the Bank of Mexico.<sup>5</sup>

The financial success of this film was accompanied by a number of awards. In 1942, The *Asociación Nacional de Periodistas Cinematográficos* awarded various prizes to the films made the previous year. *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* competed with a strong contender, the comedy *¡Ay que tiempos, señor don Simón!* by Julio Bracho in his debut as a director. Nevertheless, *¡Ay Jalisco* managed to win several awards: Jorge Negrete was nominated best male actor for his role as the *charro* Salvador “Chava” Pérez Gómez, nicknamed “El Ametralladora” for his speed with his guns; Angel Garasa won an award for best supporting actor, for his part as Malasuerte, the retired Spanish bullfighter, and the composer Manuel Esperón won one for best musical director. Other members of the cast did not receive any prizes but their careers were launched or consolidated. They did not give credit to the lyricist Ernesto Cortázar, who together with Esperón wrote two of the main songs in this film: *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!*, the theme song, and *Traigo un amor*. However, he would continue to work in partnership with Esperón, writing many of Negrete’s hits. The singer Lucha Reyes, who had previously recorded these two songs but whose film career was in decline, also appeared in this film. Negrete’s co-star Gloria Marín (Carmen Salas), who worked in popular theatre, would become a film star and Negrete’s lover for many years. The comedian “Chaflán”, who had appeared in the first version of the film *Allá en el Rancho Grande* played the role of the good-for-nothing companion of the *charro*. The Spanish actor Antonio Bravo played the Spanish *cantinero* Radilla, the godfather of “Chava”. The actor Victor Manuel Mendoza, who took the role of Felipe Carvajal, the son of a rich landowner and the rival of our hero, would continue to appear in various films of this period.

This film, influenced by *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, was a powerful combination of various elements, among them the music and the image of the *charro*, which contributed to its success. The role of the *charro* was made more forceful. The debonair tenor Tito Guizar was replaced by the more rugged baritone Jorge Negrete. In the script of this film, the *charro* changed from the softer image to a stronger, more violent one of a man on the edge of the law. In *Allá en el Rancho Grande* the *charro* does not kill anyone, but in *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!*, he does kill, even though it is to avenge the murder of his parents. The critic in the Cinema Reporter praised this film but his only reservation was:

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<sup>5</sup>García Riera, IV, p. 10.



El único pero que podría ponerse a la producción de que hablamos es que como seguramente se exhibirá en el extranjero, pudiera esparcir por el mundo la creencia de que los mexicanos no tenemos respeto alguno a la vida humana.<sup>6</sup>

In addition the music in *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* is more vibrant than in previous films. Compared with the theme song of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* in which the rural world is idealized in the lyrics and emphasized by the shrieks of laughter, *Ay Jalisco* has a heroic quality: it is almost a battle cry. However, the settings of the songs in what appear to be “real” rural situations are similar to *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, although with a few changes such as the order: the *palenque* in the state fairs, the *cantina* /restaurant (El Parián, a real *cantina* in the state of Jalisco), and the serenade, ending with a duel of songs (*huapango*) between the two rivals.

The theme song is included twice: the first time in the *palenque* and the second time in the Parián. In the scene of the *palenque*, the song is performed by Lucha Reyes, recreating the shows of the *cantadoras*, the travelling female singers who appeared in these places between the cockfights but that had disappeared by this time. The second time, the setting is the Parián and Jorge Negrete is accompanied by two trios, the male Trio Tariácuri and later the female Trío del Río joined by the band of *mariachis*. The scene of the serenade is set outside the grille window of the beloved, with Negrete singing *Traigo un Amor*, followed by a duel of words (*huapango*) between Negrete and his rival.

The film was loosely based on the novel *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes! o la Guerra Santa*, by Aurelio R. Castillo. In the book the author tried to make an analysis of the social and political problems of the *campesinos* of the region of Los Altos who fought against the Government; in this respect, the book failed because the writer’s research was insufficiently thorough.<sup>7</sup> The film features only one section of the novel, the adventures of the *charro*. The film like the novel is set in the late 1920s but in the film the rural clothes are mixed with the 1940s clothes, especially in the women’s fashion and make-up.

In the novel, “Chava” is a minor character, a bandit. In the film, the character of the *charro* is developed, taking characteristics from various sources, influenced by

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<sup>6</sup>Idem

<sup>7</sup>Alicia O. de Bonfil, *La literatura Cristera* (México: Instituto Nacional de antropología e Historia, 1970), p. 110.



melodrama in serials; he is not a bandit but he kills - and this is justified, as in the serials, because of the injustices committed against him. From the popular theatre and the *corridos* of *El Valentón*, the film absorbs the language praising the *charro's machismo*, but there is an element of self-parody. As in the case of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, *¡Ay Jalisco* takes from melodrama the themes of love, revenge and the family. There is suspense maintained by the audience's recognition of the real assassins, and there is the triumph of true love. A series of songs clearly influenced by the aggressive style of Lucha Reyes made the *comedias rancheras* and their songs a distinctive genre in the Mexican cinema of the 1940s. In the following section I intend to analyse how various elements of the melodrama in the serials, popular theatre, and *corridos* influenced the way in which the songs were used in this film in realistic settings, a characteristic established by *Allá en el Rancho Grande*.

## 6.1 THE PLOT IN THE FILM AND IN THE NOVEL

As previously stated, this film, is based on the novel by Aurelio R. Castillo, *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes! o La Guerra Santa*, whose central theme is the *Cristero* Rebellion (1926-29), a struggle between Plutarco Elías Calles government and the Catholic Church, which had the support of many of the *campesinos*. It was published in 1938, ten years after the rebellion had ended.<sup>8</sup> One of the main centres of conflict was the region of Los Altos in the state of Jalisco.

Films which re-write history, Foucault tells us, "have ...a context."<sup>9</sup> Although *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* is not a historical film, it takes as its background a war which not only greatly affected the lives of ordinary people but also the political establishment.<sup>10</sup> The film was made during the first year of the government of Manuel Ávila Camacho. He had served in the Government army fighting against the *Cristeros* in the region of Los Altos. The cost of this rebellion was 70,000 dead, resulting in a drop in agricultural production and the migration of 200,000 to the main cities of Mexico and 430,000 to the US.<sup>11</sup> From the start of his government he tried to unify the nation and put behind him the divisions wrought by this conflict among the government, the religious people and ordinary civilians. As an attempt at reconciliation just after his election as President (1940-46), in a secular state, Ávila Camacho declared "Soy creyente", an olive branch to the Catholic faction. He also made a point of visiting the region of Los Altos where he had fought against the *Cristeros* as a goodwill gesture. Although the government did not

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<sup>8</sup>For a detailed study of this movement see: Jean A. Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People between Church and State, 1926-1929* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976).

<sup>9</sup>Michel Foucault, 'Film and Popular Memory', *Radical Philosophy*, 11 (1975), 24-6 (p. 24).

<sup>10</sup>Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), p. 423.

<sup>11</sup>Idem



have direct influence on the content of films, the mood was conciliatory and the producers and government were trying to build a national industry which the government was supporting.

The novel deals with the consequences of the war for the people of Jalisco. Through the main character Doctor Hornedo and the frequent interventions of the narrator, the writer tries to describe the people, the region and the events which took place during this period. The doctor, through whose eyes much of the story is told, does not participate directly in the *Cristero* movement, but due to his profession he becomes reluctantly involved. The story begins when he is called to help some men who have been wounded: this event reminds him of the story of Salvador "Chava" Pérez Gómez, *El Ametralladora*. It is the story of Chava Gómez which forms the plot of the film and may be summarized as follows:

Chava is a young and restless *ranchero* in the State of Jalisco. His boon companion is his *mayordomo* and *vaquero* Cayetano. After the death of his father and the departure of his mother to Mexico City, Chava begins to frequent the *cantina* *El Amor Nunca Muere*, owned by one of the best card players of the region, Radilla. Chava does not go there to drink but to learn to play cards from him. Meanwhile his ranch is neglected and General Carvajal, a greedy landowner, casts envious eyes on the ranch and tries to cheat him out of it. There is a chance meeting between Chava and the General and his accomplices. A quarrel ensues and Chava shoots them all, earning the nickname *El Ametralladora* (The Machine-gunner), from the speed of his fire. Chava escapes to a life of banditry. It is this incident which is expanded to form the plot of the film. Chava is played by Jorge Negrete in the style publicized as *El Charro Cantor*. In the novel Chava is forgotten and the story, unlike the film, continues with the story of Doctor Hornedo and his experiences in the war.

Through the characters and the narrator, the writer takes the side of the Government with comments such as: "No obstante la ecuanimidad del Estado, la sangre empezó a correr."<sup>12</sup> There is also an attempt to blame the other side: "El clero azuzaba a la gente. Las mujeres fanáticas".<sup>13</sup> However, more than an analysis, the novel emphasises the distinctiveness of the region through descriptions of its people, music, the band of *mariachis*, lists of food and fruits of the region, the fairs and the use of some of the regional language expressions, such as *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!*

The novel starts with an account of the fair of San Pedro y San Juan in the town of Tlaquepaque, with a description of the entertainment and the music of the *mariachis*:

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>13</sup> Aurelio Robles Castillo, *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes! o la Guerra Santa* (México: Botas, 1938), p. 161.



Sobresaliendo de aquel barullo se escuchaban, ya por aquí, ya por el centro del Parián, o en las cantinas, las coplas picarescas de los mariachis y su típica música llena de alegría... otras plena de melancolía... o también con el fatal determinismo... Y *Ay Jalisco no te rajes, que caray!* o si me han de matar mañana que me maten di'una vez.<sup>14</sup>

When Doctor Hornedo comes home he hears a serenade called *Ojos Tapatíos*. This song in fact came from the popular theatre, but in the novel it is presented as if it were part of the traditions of the region. By the end of the novel, Doctor Hornos has died and the government and the *Agraristas* have captured and killed the leader of the *Cristeros*. While the *Cristeros* are being buried the writer describes how one could hear in the distance the *mariachi* music in which one of the verses is the title of the novel:

Mientras les daba piadose sepultura a los cadáveres, allá de lo lejos y traído por el viento de la noche, venía la copla 'amalada' del mariachi: ¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes, no te rajes!, ¡Qué caray!<sup>15</sup>

The film took its name from the first part of the title of the novel, *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!*, and ignored the second part which was *La Guerra Santa*, thus leaving out any possibility of analysis of the rebellion. The film is preceded by the conventional introduction:

La versión de esta película está inspirada en hechos que pudieron ocurrir durante la época violenta de la revolución armada en que, como era natural, el desbordamiento de las pasiones hacía nugatorio el ejercicio de la ley. Cualquier semejanza con personas es mera coincidencia.

The film disclaims any connection with actual events but the character of Chava is believed to have been based on a real bandit who lived in the region at the time of the *Cristero* Revolt. According to Monsiváis the bandit's name was Rodolfo Álvarez del

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 239.



Castillo, *El Remington*.<sup>16</sup> The emotional language of the film's introduction is the language of excess, the language of melodrama, which indeed is one of its sources. In the film Chava is the central character but his role is romanticized. Some of the other characters from the book find their way into the film, for example Chaflán the hero's boon companion (in the novel he is called Cayetano), Radilla the owner of the *cantina*, and the evil General Carvajal. However, the adventures of *El Ametralladora* bear no relationship to the book and the film brings in the themes of love, misunderstanding and revenge.

In the film, the central character is Salvador (Chava) Pérez Gómez. As a 12 year old boy, he returns home to find both his parents murdered by unknown assassins. This event is not taken from the novel but serves to provide some motivation for the hero and to present him in a favourable light. The boy is taken to his godfather, Radilla (Antonio Bravo) the owner of a *cantina*, by his faithful companion Chaflán (Carlos López). Chava vows to avenge the murder of his parents when he grows up. This opportunity arises with the visit to the *cantina* by the ex-bullfighter Malasuerte (Angel Garasa) who tells him that he was part of the group of hired assassins, although he was paid only as a look-out. He offers to point out to Chava the murderers and the instigator of the crime on the understanding that he will receive a reward for each of them. In the meantime Chava has fallen in love with the beautiful Carmen Salas (Gloria Marín) who loves him in return. He goes away to the fair of Teocaltiche, a town in the state of Jalisco, to find the killers of his parents, but also finds time to go the *palenque* and the Parián, a type of *restaurante típico* where he hears music and sings with his companions. Meanwhile, in true melodramatic style, the villainous Felipe Carvajal (Víctor Manuel Mendoza) and his father, the self styled "general", use arm-twisting methods to effect a marriage between Felipe and Carmen to gain her ranch. She accepts in order to save her father's ranch from bankruptcy.

On his return, Chava, who is now known as *El Ametralladora* for his speed in killing some of the assassins of his parents, goes to serenade Carmen. While he serenades his beloved, Felipe appears, dressed in his lounge suit as always, with a group of musicians. There is a type a duel of words between the two rivals, but this later develops into a fight. Chava discovers that Carmen is engaged to Felipe. The next day the two rivals participate in a horse race which the *charro* Chava wins. Here he discovers that the leader of the assassins is Felipe's father who wanted to take over their ranch. When El Malasuerte accuses El General he shoots him but El Malasuerte also shoots back, thus both die. However, there is a happy ending Chava discovers that Carmen loves him and she in her simple carriage and he on his horse ride off into the sunset. This film, just as

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<sup>16</sup>Quoted by Tania Carreño King, *El charro: la construcción de un estereotipo nacional: 1920-1940* (México: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución, 2000), p. 85.



*Allá en el Rancho Grande* had done earlier, used the music in settings which seemed “real”. The order was changed but there are still the three settings: the fair and its *palenques*, the *cantina* (El Parián), and the serenade, in this case with the duel of songs taking place in the street instead of the *cantina*.

## 6.2 THE SETTING OF THE SONGS

### 6.2.1 EL PALENQUE: LUCHA REYES AND HER INFLUENCE ON THE CHARRO CANTOR.

The two main songs in the film: *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* and *Traigo un amor* were already hits for the singer Lucha Reyes. Although, still popular with the public, at this time she was no longer in favour with film directors. However, her popularity and influence could not be ignored and Joselito Rodríguez included a scene featuring her interpretation of the theme song. From the *cantadoras*, the travelling singers in the *palenques*, Lucha Reyes had brought to the mainstream of popular theatre, radio and cinema a new way putting over Mexican songs. Previously, many female singers had been influenced by the semi-operatic style of the *zarzuela*. Lucha Reyes had established the “estilo bravío”, the assertive, masculine throaty style which was decisive in the development of what we now call *canciones rancheras*. This transition was aided by the influence of composers such as Esperón and Cortázar, Lalo Guerrero, Gilberto Parra and Joaquín Pardavé who wrote songs specially for her.<sup>17</sup>

Like the previous hit *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* re-created, with more emphasis, the atmosphere of the commercial fairs in the state of Jalisco: La Feria de Teocaltiche, La Feria de San Pedro Tlaquepaque, and la Feria de San Juan de los Lagos. The serials had earlier used real events, places and people in their stories, making people recognize their world around them. The fairs were a perfect setting for the writers of the serials. In the serial *Los Bandidos de Río Frío* there is a description of these fairs and especially the Feria de San Juan de los Lagos:

Lagos, camino de Guadalajara, es una villa situada en un terreno pedregoso y árido; San Juan, que le sigue, es todavía mas triste...El pueblo, polvoriento y sucio los once meses del año, se vestía de limpio y se lavaba la cara el mes de diciembre.... una ciudad improvisada en menos de un mes, que rodeaba el cerro y el pueblo de piedra...Plaza de gallos;

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<sup>17</sup>Carlos Monsiváis, ‘Lola Beltrán: Que le toquen *Las Golondrinas*’, in *Proceso*, 10 April 1996, 52-4 (p. 53).



teatro principal, donde se representaban sainetes las compañías de la legua, y a veces hasta comedias enteras, desempeñadas por los actores de México; salón de títeres; cafés, fondas y hoteles; pero todo de lo más frágil, de lo más ligero.<sup>18</sup>

The fairs, which brought together people from all the regions of Mexico and different social classes were the ideal setting to recreate the distinctiveness of the country. Apart from the commercial, social and religious importance of these fairs, one of their characteristics was the music. These fairs where places where the *corridistas* and *músicos ambulantes* met and increased their repertoire through contact with other singers. The serials describe this: "Las músicas ambulantes de bandolones, guitarras y jaranitas que preludiaban cancioncillas del país para llamar la atención de los muchos que iban y venían, y adquirir algunos cuartos para comenzar el día."<sup>19</sup> Many of these musicians also played between the cockfights.

*Ay Jalisco* re-created the atmosphere of the *palenque* and the entertainment between the cockfights. The performer in the *palenque* is not the main star Jorge Negrete but the singer Lucha Reyes. According to the composer Manuel Esperón in a personal interview, by this time Lucha Reyes was an alcoholic; this had damaged her voice and her opportunities for employment by film producers. He adds that it was Negrete who asked the director Joselito Rodríguez to include her in this film as a sort of homage.<sup>20</sup> While this is difficult to prove now, she had recorded the theme song before the film was made. She was still popular with radio and theatre audiences, and had a series of successes with the songs: *Caminito de Contreras* (Severiano Briseño) and *Los Tarzanes* (Severiano Briseño), in 1941 and the previous year with *La Tequilera* (Alfredo D'Orsay). Her influence is without doubt of great importance for the development of the style of singing which would be associated with the female *ranchera* singers.

Lucha Reyes was born María de la Luz Flores Acevedo in Guadalajara in 1906. At the age of thirteen, she started to work in popular theatre, at a time when operatic and semi-operatic styles were in vogue. In 1917 she and her mother moved from her native Guadalajara to Mexico City, where she began to work in various theatres in the *barrios*. Her career began to flourish and in 1920 she toured the South of the USA where she met the Mexican singer Nancy Torres. Her visit was originally planned for a few weeks but she worked there until 1924.<sup>21</sup> On her return to Mexico City, she worked with some of

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<sup>18</sup>Manuel Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, 2nd edn (México: Porrúa, 1964), pp. 560-61.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 563.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with the composer Manuel Esperón, 16 April 1996. Mexico City.

<sup>21</sup>Salvador Morales, *La música mexicana* (México: Universo, 1981), pp. 164-66



the famous singers and actors of the time, such as the comedian Amelia Wihelmy and the tenor José Limón who, as has been pointed out, was the first singer to record *Ojos Tapatíos*. Later, she joined the Ascencio sisters and formed the Trío Reyes-Ascencio and later sang with another popular female group of the time, the *Cuarteto Anáhuac*. In this period her style of singing was semi-operatic, as was much popular music at the time both in Mexico and other countries, with songs such as *Amapola del Camino*. In 1927 after a difficult tour in Europe, she came back to Mexico and for more than a year was unable to sing, having lost her voice.<sup>22</sup>

When she recovered, her voice had changed and deepened, and she adopted the style of singing of the *cantadoras* as more suitable for her new type of voice. The *cantadoras* in the early years of the twentieth century were women who sang between the cockfights and would travel from fair to fair to earn their living in the *palenques*: “mujeres de senos frondosos, especializadas en corridos y canciones ‘alebrestadas’, quebrantaban el murmullo y la tensión de los palenques”.<sup>23</sup> Monsiváis points out in his usual ironic way how Ramón López Velarde in one his best known poems *Suave Patria*, written in the early 1920’s, when the *cantadoras* had almost disappeared, preserved their memory in verse:<sup>24</sup>

Quieren morir tu ánima y tu estilo,  
cuan muriéndose van las cantadoras  
que en las ferias, con el bravío pecho  
empitonando la camisa, han hecho  
la lujuria y el ritmo de las horas.<sup>25</sup>

By the 1930s, the *cantadoras* were forgotten but Lucha Reyes, revived their technique creating a new style of singing: “al recuperar la voz pudo entonar con un color de contralto y un matiz enronquecido y bronco la naciente canción-ranchera citadina”.<sup>26</sup> She applied this style to the new type of songs written for the radio and the cinema: “recupera el estilo de las cantadoras y lo aplica a un nuevo repertorio, ya cabalmente

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 167.

<sup>23</sup>Monsiváis, ‘Lola’, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup>Apart from Monsiváis and his observations on Ramón López Velarde, there is little work done on the *cancioneras*. There is no information as to when they started. The *palenques* were regulated by the Crown during the Colonial period but there are no references to these singers. Perhaps after the Independence, they began to be more acceptable.

<sup>25</sup>Ramón López Velarde, *Suave Patria y otros poemas* (La Habana: Cuadernos de Poesía/7, 1964), p. 11.

<sup>26</sup>Yolanda Moreno Rivas, ‘Los inmortales de la canción ranchera’, in *Historia de la música popular mexicana* (México: Alianza, 1989), pp. 181-231 (p. 190).



filmico, bravío, bronco, de ternura arisca y compromiso existencial.”<sup>27</sup> Monsiváis states that before Reyes, the song which had been known as *canciones mexicanas* during the period of nationalism in the 1920s, were the old rural songs sung in an operatic and semi-operatic style: “se instala, con el favor de tenores, sopranos y contraltos, el subgénero llamado ‘canción mexicana’... que exalta a lo bucólico y acude a los afanes líricos para ‘adecentar’ lo rural”.<sup>28</sup> He gives as examples songs like *Marchita el alma*, *Rayando el sol*, *Adiós mi Chaparrita* and even *Allá en el Rancho Grande*.

According to Monsiváis, the achievement of Lucha Reyes was to mark the beginning of the *canciones rancheras* in the 1930s, which in their themes sum up what “rural” should be: “En rigor, con ella surge la canción ranchera, al sintetizar en temas y versiones lo que en los treinta y cuarenta se considera ‘lo propio del rancho’, la mezcla de atmósferas nacionalistas y localistas con amores dolorosos y angustiados.”<sup>29</sup> By the end of the decade, in spite of the critics who complained of her lack of ‘refinement’, Lucha Reyes had become the symbol of “la mujer bravía y temperamental a la mexicana”.<sup>30</sup> After her, male and female singers in a more highly organized media industry were to build on her legacy and to transform *canciones rancheras* into a recognized genre. Lucha Reyes died on the 26th June 1944, the same day as “Carmelita” the wife of Porfirio Díaz. Salvador Novo wrote in his diary: “el mismo día murió Lucha Reyes, la cancionera... la que por tantos conceptos podría estimarse como la representante de la Revolución hecha canción, vivió treinta y cinco años (sic), y se arrebató la vida por su propia voluntad. (Carmencita) la que pasaba por el símbolo de la aristocracia y de la dictadura, alcanzó los ochenta, y murió rodeada por sus familiares, y auxiliada por la bendición papal”.<sup>31</sup>

Lucha Reyes’ recorded version of *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* is different from Jorge Negrete’s. She is the solo singer and is accompanied by a band with guitars, *guitarrón* and violin. In this accompaniment the trumpet is missing and the violin plays the brief melody which floats above the orchestra, a part which in Negrete’s version will be played by the trumpet. The insistent rhythm of the galloping horse, beaten out on the guitar adds to the excitement. There is a violin phrase which cuts across the rhythm. It is a bravura performance with verve and energy. Her voice has resonant chest notes and conveys vitality and exuberance, yet she never resorts to shouting. She manages to express emotions with her voice in a style which foreshadows Piaf. The film re-created the *cantadora* in the arena of the cockfight, surrounded by the gamblers dressed in rural clothes. Lucha Reyes introduces *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!*, the title song of the film in the

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<sup>27</sup>Monsiváis, ‘Lola’, p. 53.

<sup>28</sup>Idem

<sup>29</sup>Idem

<sup>30</sup>Idem

<sup>31</sup>Salvador Novo, *La vida en México en el periodo presidencial de Manuel Ávila Camacho* (México: Conacultur, 1994), p. 141.



centre of the *palenque*. Her hairstyle is unsophisticated, with a ribbon to hold it back, and her dress is the simple rural dress of the *rancheras*, but decorated with the bead necklaces of the Mexican national costume. This feminine image is dispelled by her voice and stance. She stands in the centre of the *palenque* with her hands on her hips looking at the audience.

This film has been criticized for creating an artificial image of “lo mexicano” with a mixture of folk elements such as cockfights, the *mariachi* and the use of crafts, tequila and sarapes.<sup>32</sup> There is an over-use of these symbols to represent what is supposed to be “lo mexicano”, however, the images in the film offer various layers of interpretation. While the main character Chava (Negrete) and his friends are taking their seats, we see a sign on the wall of the arena with the words Los Altos, which a Mexican audience would recognize as a region in Jalisco where cockfights actually took place. The camera pans round to the stage where the *mariachis* are sitting: there is a sign saying “Los Mariachis”, underlining the obvious. The general effect of these visual images are emphasized by the lyrics of the song, the accompaniment and Lucha Reyes’ style of singing. In the film she sings, while Negrete enters the *palenque* to take his seat. She seems to be welcoming Negrete to the arena but her pose is with arms akimbo and there is a swagger in her stride and a challenge in her demeanour. He smiles as he takes his seat. In a kind of role-reversal she sings a taunting serenade to him. In this version, she only sings the three verses related to her love for Jalisco:

¡Ay! Jalisco no te rajes  
me sale del alma  
gritar con valor  
abrir todo el pecho  
pa’ echar este grito  
que lindo es Jalisco,  
palabra de honor.

In this scene, the verses describing the women of Jalisco which she had sung on her record are omitted, as is the chorus. She continues with the verse describing the men, while the camera takes a medium shot of Negrete and his friends and then the *Mariachis*:

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<sup>32</sup>Carreño King, p. 83.



¡Ay! Jalisco, Jalisco  
tus hombres son machos  
y son cumplidores  
valientes y ariscos  
y sostenedores  
no admiten rivales  
en cosas de amores.

Es su orgullo  
su traje de charro  
taer su pistola  
fajada en el cinto,

tener su guitarra  
enchar mucho tipo  
y a los que presumen  
quitarles el hipo

The lyrics of the song could be expressed colloquially as “do you want a fight?” or “Don’t mess with me” and by implication “I can get any woman I want”. This portrayal of the *charro* as “macho” was criticized later by Octavio Paz and others. According to Octavio for the Mexican man: “el ideal de la hombría consiste en no ‘rajarse’ nunca”.<sup>33</sup> Paz’s interpretation of *machismo* posits a dichotomy between the *macho*, “ser hermético, encerrado en si mismo, capaz de guardarse y guardar lo que se le confía” and woman seen as inferior by men because “es un ser rajado, abierto”.<sup>34</sup> Ayala Blanco takes these ideas further and points out that “El machismo es el modelo de vida de las comunidades cerradas al tiempo y al espacio. Y, en la *canción ranchera* o se es un macho tremendista y simpático o se es un personaje sometido al macho, a merced de sus desmanes”.<sup>35</sup>

However, in the film while she sings Lucha Reyes approaches Chava (Negrete) and his companions, the comic characters Chaflán and Malasuerte. There is a theatrical teasing between her and the men. Chava pinches her thigh and she retaliates by grabbing Malasuerte round the neck, pretending to be the strong one. In this version of the song, the violin soars above the orchestra with bursts of stabbing counterpoint, emphasizing the virile quality of the voice, and all the time the driving masculine rhythm of the galloping horse. This is no ‘shrinking violet’. She can ‘give as good as she gets!’ The

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<sup>33</sup>Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad* (México: FCE, 1973), p. 26.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>35</sup>Jorge Ayala Blanco, *La aventura del cine mexicano* (México: Era, 1968), p. 68.



message is in her demeanour and the projection of the voice. (Later in the film *Negrete* will reprise this song: there is no 'contest' between the contralto and the baritone, and *Negrete* asserts his dominance with a high note at the end). That the cinema, influenced by popular culture, manages in this scene to keep alive the memory of the tradition of the *cantadoras* – which would otherwise have been forgotten and also to evoke the *voluntades* of the Revolutionary period. All these images are linked in popular memory and this explains why the governments of the post-revolutionary period made use of this genre to forge a Mexican national identity. In the early 1940s there were still men and women from the audience who had lived in the countryside. For them, this scene may constitute a recovery of popular memory but with their own experience. Rafaela Guido tells us "yo iba poco a las peleas de gallos porque no me gustaba ver morir a los gallos. Se iba principalmente a apostar. No recuerdo a las cantadoras pero había un poco de música y mucho espectáculo".



The *chirre* costume had already been used in other films, following the tradition of the popular theatre. Carreño King points out that the success of *Negrete* was due to the use of music and the *ranchero* songs. However, in *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* the use of the *raíces* was quite similar to that in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* so other factors must be considered and the term *canciones rancheras* was not applied consistently to either this

5. Still from *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* From left to right *Malasuerte*, *Chaflán*, *Chava* (*Negrete*) and *Lucha Reyes*.

<sup>20</sup>David Negrete, *Jorge Negrete: Biografía del cine mexicano* (Mexico: Diana, 1989), p. 137. From the *Orfina* Newspaper *La Alarma*, during Jorge Negrete's tour in 1946, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup>*Negrete*, p. 116 and interview with M. Escobar.

<sup>22</sup>Idem.



message is in her demeanour and the projection of the voice. (Later in the film Negrete will reprise this song: there is no ‘contest’ between the contralto and the baritone, and Negrete asserts his dominance with a high note at the end). Thus the cinema, influenced by popular culture, manages in this scene to keep alive the memory of the tradition of the *cantadoras* which would otherwise have been forgotten and also to evoke the *soldaderas* of the Revolutionary period. All these images are linked in popular memory and this explains why the governments of the post-revolutionary period made use of this genre to forge a Mexican national identity. In the early 1940s there were still men and women from the audience who had lived in the countryside. For them this scene may constitute a recovery of popular memory but with their own experiences. Rafaela Guido tells us “yo iba poco a las peleas de gallos porque no me gustaba ver morir a los gallos. Se iba principalmente a apostar. No recuerdo a las cantadoras pero había un poco de música y mucho escándalo. Me encantaban las películas de Jorge Negrete y no me importaba ver las peleas de gallos allí porque había mucha música, además las peleas eran diferentes, era ‘un arte’ no había el escándalo de las peleas reales.”<sup>36</sup>

### 6.2.2 EL RESTAURANTE/LA CANTINA (EL PARLAN)

The song *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* and the part which Jorge Negrete played in this film would identify him forever with the image of the *charro cantor*. Even though the song had been written in 1941, during Negrete’s tour to Cuba, a local journalist wrote after one of Negrete’s concerts that this song was “una canción que no acaba de ponerse vieja porque tiene la suerte de tener un poco la fragancia áspera de lo genuino”.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, Negrete was reluctant to sing it because, as the composer Esperón recalled later, it did not “say anything to him”: “yo no pienso cantar esta canción, es una porquería. En lo particular no me dice nada...”.<sup>38</sup> It was the threat of legal action by the director which forced him to sing the song. He was also reluctant to dress up as a *charro*: ‘Y para colmo, no me gusta vestirme de charrito.’<sup>39</sup> However, he was later to get married in a *charro* costume.

The *charro* costume had already been used in other films, following the tradition of the popular theatre. Carreño King points out that the success of Negrete was due to the use of music and the *ranchero* songs. However, in *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* the use of the music was quite similar to that in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* so other factors must be considered and the term *canciones rancheras* was not applied consistently to either this

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<sup>36</sup>Interview with Rafaela Guido. 22 July 2002.

<sup>37</sup>Diana Negrete, *Jorge Negrete: biografía autorizada* (México: Diana, 1989), p. 137. From the Cuban Newspaper *La Marina*, during Jorge Negrete’s tour in 1944.

<sup>38</sup>Negrete, p. 116 and interview with M. Esperón.

<sup>39</sup>Idem



type of film or the songs.

In this era composers such as Lalo Guerrero, Pepe Guizar, Joaquín Pardavé, Chucho Monge, Esperón and Cortázar wrote songs whose lyrics expressed the love of the region with its distinctive traditions: “celebración pública: del estado natal, de la nación y sus productos, del jaripeo, de las serenatas, de la exhibición de los sentimientos rotundo.”<sup>40</sup> This song belongs to the period of the 1930s and 1940s, where various composers of rural songs see the ideal countryside as an image of “lo nacional”: “aún ligados a la idea de lo telúrico, del campo como esencia de lo nacional.”<sup>41</sup>

However, this nationalism was not only followed by the composers of this type of music but by various “classical” composers who were inspired by different types of folk music. For example Blas Galindo (1910-93) drew from his native Jalisco the inspiration for *Sones de Mariachi* (1940), what the Mexican conductor Enrique Bátiz calls a: “brilliant synthesis of popular Mexican music.”<sup>42</sup>

Another composer of this period, José Pablo Moncayo (1912-1958) was inspired by the *huapangos*, folk music from the region of Veracruz, and wrote *Huapango* which Bátiz describes as: “a second national anthem. The clever use of the trumpet and the trombone in popular themes such as *El Gavilán*, *Siqui Sirí* and *Balahú* gives the work a national character not found in any other Mexican composition.”<sup>43</sup> There is also the composer Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940) who wrote music for films such as *Redes* (1934) and *La Noche de los Mayas* (1940).

The composer Esperón and the lyricist Cortázar also drew inspiration from popular music and created the basis for the *canciones rancheras*. The songs of Esperón and Cortázar have a distinctive style which sets them apart from other composers of music for the radio and cinema at the time:

Francamente emparentadas con el tradicional son jalisciense, pero con mucha mayor sofisticación, hacían gala de una invención y una frescura que mantenía en los oídos del oyentes el nexo cada vez más lejano con la provincia campirana.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Monsiváis, ‘Lola’, p. 54.

<sup>41</sup>Idem

<sup>42</sup>*Latin American Classics Vol. 1*. Enrique Bátiz. CD Naxos 8.550838

<sup>43</sup>Idem

<sup>44</sup>Moreno Rivas, p. 187.



This film, in the same way as *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, used the music in situations which might occur in real life; and after the performance of Lucha Reyes in the *palenque*, the theme song in the *cantina* was performed. However, in *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* there were some changes from *Allá en el Rancho Grande*: instead of an all male gathering, in this film the setting is the Parián, a well known *restaurant/cantina* in Jalisco, also mentioned in the novel on which the film was based.

From the start the music is used in a more systematic form. While the credits roll down in the background there is the music of the songs which will be sung in the film and the inclusion of other songs already known to the audience such as a few notes of the song *Guadalajara*. When the name of Jorge Negrete appears, the audience see in the background the image of a *charro* on his horse and hear the theme music which they will now associate with him. As a sort of introduction, the film begins with a scene of a twelve or thirteen year old riding across the plains and arriving at the far end of the ranch, to be met by his faithful *peón* Chaflán. He seems very happy and this is reinforced by a happy tune with the rhythm of a galloping horse creating the atmosphere of open-air freedom and happiness. This ends very soon when they both hear some shots coming from the entrance of the *rancho*. Inside, two bodies, covered by a blanket, lie on the floor. The child, now an orphan, is taken by Chaflán to his godfather Radilla, the owner of the town's *cantina* named *Cuando el Amor Muere*. The child swears to avenge the murder of both his parents: "los mataré como perros".

With the use of the same technique employed by Fernando de Fuentes to show the passing of time, we see Chaflán and Radilla, sitting at a table, teaching the child to play cards. The hands shuffling the cards become a man's hands and there are images of cattle, horses, *charros*, interspersed with scenes of the *palenque* in a moving montage to represent the life of the young man. The camera moves up to the faces of the card players and we see an older Chaflán and Radilla accompanied by Chava now grown up. Later, while Chaflán is drying the glasses behind the counter of the *cantina*, he jokily sings the song *Traigo un amor*, as many people do in everyday life while doing ordinary tasks. This introduces the audience to the song that Negrete will sing later as a serenade to his beloved.

Just before the beginning of the song, the film tries to re-create the distinctiveness of the region in which the novel was set, by presenting a montage of various scenes, some of which have occurred previously but augmented by a series of images of what is yet to come: the customers in the *cantina* and the faces of the female singers, Mexican crafts and various views of the city of Guadalajara, while in the background we hear the song *Guadalajara* with which the audience will be familiar from an earlier film. The beginning



of the scene of El Parián, which is one of the most important in the film, is quite theatrical. In the centre under an arch stand three women, (Trío del Río) wearing frilly floral dresses -more elaborate than the one worn by Lucha Reyes. They have plaits, and are wearing dangling earrings. They begin the song *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!*, accompanied by the band of *mariachis*. As an introduction, they hum three ascending soprano notes. Customers of the restaurant pass by in the background. Some of these passers-by are wearing contemporary 1940s clothes; others are in traditional rural costumes which enables the audience to participate in the narrative of the film by identifying with these contemporary characters.

In a shot favoured by Fernando de Fuentes and copied in various *ranchero* films, the angle of the camera takes in the profiles of the female singers (Trío del Río). The two dark-haired ones are nearer the camera but the blonde one is further away: her face is sometimes incomplete, giving her less importance. The women are not looking directly at the camera, but slightly to one side. This gives the audience the impression that they are one with the customers in the restaurant. In a medium shot, the camera pans round to show the customers, among them Negrete, entering the place with Chaflán and Malasuerte. He starts to sing the song in a resonant, ringing voice and soon becomes the focus of attention. His entrance seems almost casual and at times he is almost concealed behind the pillar of the arches. The lyrics praise the region and play with the theme of Jalisco's sobriquet La Perla de Occidente.

¡Ay!, Jalisco, Jalisco  
tu tienes tu novia  
que es Guadalajara  
muchacha bonita  
la perla más rara  
de todo Jalisco  
es mi Guadalajara

The lyrics of the song describe the *mariachis* and the film shows them acting out their role hovering round the customers at their tables. The lyrics, characteristic of the songs of this period, re-create popular culture and tell the audience how they should react to this music.

Y me gusta escuchar  
los mariachis,



cantar con el alma  
sus lindas canciones,

oír como suenan  
esos guitarrones  
y echarme un tequila  
con los valentones.

The camera pans round to the group of girls (Trío del Río) who sing the chorus of the song, while Chava (Negrete) and his friends sit down at a table and exchange banter.

¡Ay, Jalisco no te rajes!  
me sale del alma  
guitar con calor  
abrir todo el pecho  
pa' echar este grito  
¡Qué lindo es Jalisco!  
palabra de honor

Then, the camera goes back again to the male Trío Tariácuri who sing in praise of the beauty of the girls of Jalisco; at the same time the camera offers close-ups of the girl's faces. The girls are chosen to represent the "traditional" ideal of Mexican beauty with long dark hair often in plaits, big brown eyes and flashing smiles. The lyrics of the song are impersonal and make generalized comments about the beauty of Jalisco's women, this and its visual image creates a sense of identification.

Pa'mujeres  
Jalisco primero  
lo mismo en Los Altos  
que allá en La Cañada

mujeres muy lindas  
rechulas de cara  
así son las hembras  
de Guadalajara.



In the next scene, while the male trio continue playing their guitars and singing, dressed in their dark shirts and trousers, moving around the place, the camera moves from long shots to show the atmosphere of happiness in the place, to close-ups of the faces of the people in time to the verses of the song. The lyrics describe, again not in the first person, how the men of the region court their women with romance, but if they are threatened they know how to use their guns: “*echar mucha bala*”, however the visual images contains no violence.<sup>45</sup>

En Jalisco  
se quiere a la buena  
porque es peligroso  
querer a la mala

por una morena  
echar mucha bala  
y bajo la luna  
cantar en Chapala

¡Ay! Jalisco no te rajes  
me sale del alma  
guitar con calor  
abrir todo el pecho  
pa’ echar este grito

¡Qué lindo es Jalisco!  
palabra de honor

The female trio takes over from the male group and continues to sing the next verses of the song. This refers to the description of the character of the men of Jalisco, while the camera presents close ups of the men in the Parián, who ironically look remarkably happy and peaceful. Some of these are the “qualities” of the *charro* or rural dweller and praised in some of the serials. The *Charro* is a man of his word, brave, not very talkative but now best described as *macho* (brave and strong). Yet, we see a *tequila* drinker with a very happy face, enjoying himself, without showing any aggression to anybody.

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<sup>45</sup>In Lucha Reyes’ version, the word is *enchar* mucha bala, the mispronunciation appears to link the word to rural speech.



Meanwhile there are images of the *mariachi* band and a trumpeter. The visual images parallel the lyrics and sometimes make an ironic comment on them: the words speak of “machos, valientes y ariscos” but the men look harmless. This verse is not in the first person, thus it is not the *charro* singing to himself but it is in third person, making the audience join in the praise of the *charro*.

¡Ay! Jalisco, Jalisco  
tus hombres  
son machos  
y son cumplidores

valientes y ariscos  
y sostenedores  
no admiten rivales  
en cosas de amores,

es su orgullo  
su traje de charro  
traer su pistola  
fajada en el cinto

tener su guitarra  
enchar mucho tipo  
y a los que presumen  
quitarles el hipo.

The song rises to a climax with Negrete taking centre stage accompanied by the female trio repeating the chorus twice and finishing with a high note as the audience throw their *sombreros* in the air and applaud. The lyrics re-inforce this sense of community by using the first person to say “me sale del alma/gritar con valor”, the lyrics invite the audience to join the singer.

¡Ay, Jalisco no te rajes  
me sale del alma  
gritar con calor  
abrir todo el pecho  
pa’ echar este grito



¡Qué lindo es Jalisco!  
palabra de honor

With his role in this film and the theme song, Jorge Negrete has been seen as the character who sums up “lo mexicano” and the image of the *charro* as: “valiente, machista, dicharachero, nacionalista y cantador”.<sup>46</sup> Carreño King adds that the songs in their lyrics describe the “invented” and generalized image of the nation centred on Jalisco and its inhabitants: “charros valentones, bebedores de tequila and machos cumplidores.”<sup>47</sup>

However, this song, and others which were included in these films, have various meanings according to the context in which they are played and heard. In the context of the film, as previously pointed out, while the female singers praise “tus hombres son machos y son cumplidores,/ valientes, ariscos y sostenedores,/ no admiten rivales en cosa de amores”, the camera shows faces of men who with theatrical gestures show they are drunk, or laugh. None of them shows any of the characteristics of the “macho”. This also happens in the scene where Lucha Reyes sings this song. The *charro* and his companions, the comic characters, tease each other and the singer. When the song is performed on both occasions, there are no scenes of violence nor any visual images of the *charro* as a *macho*. The *charro* in fact is in the background.

The film does have some violence: the hero’s shooting of the assassins in the *palenque*; there is some influence from the Westerns, with the hero shooting with his two guns. There is a moment of black humour: Chava forgives one assassin, but when the latter kneels before him, he accidentally shoots him. There is a gruesome scene in which we see a bullet hole in the middle of his forehead. The tragi-comedy of this scene seems reminiscent of the humour of the picaresque.

The image of the *charro* has various elements taken from the melodrama of the serials, from popular theatre and from the *corridos*. In the film, the characters are treated with humour: there is a certain degree of parody in the hero. Most of the songs in this scene are by the male and female trios, with the *charro* in the background. Once removed from the context of the film, the songs begin to take on a life of their own, as does the image of the *charro*. If performed on the radio or in live performances in the theatre, or at civic celebrations, the song and the image of the *charro* can be taken at face value and without irony. This song was included as part of civic celebrations like the 16th of September, Independence Day, where the *charro* would be accompanied by nationalistic

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<sup>46</sup>Carreño King, p. 83.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 85.



symbols such as the flag and the *mariachi* band wearing the *charro* costumes. The *charro* costume itself had its nationalistic symbols, for example the eagle of the flag on the back of the jacket. Thus it represented “lo mexicano”.

For Carreño King, the stereotype of the *charro* summed up the conservative values and ideologies opposed to those of the post-revolutionary governments. This question remains: if the image of the *charro* is reactionary, why did the post-revolutionary governments adopt it as a symbol of the Mexican? Carreño King's answer is that there was a need to unify a very pluralistic country. This is one explanation, but there are other issues to be considered. In the nationalism of the post-revolutionary governments, “el pueblo” was at the centre of representation. Ever since the period of Álvaro Obregón, the government had used popular theatre to represent what was “truly” Mexican; the *charro* was already part of this tradition, and the *ranchero* films served to re-inforce it. The *charro* appears to represent what is “authentic” Mexican culture. *Ay Jalisco* and its accompanying images could be used to represent this “authentic national” culture, particularly when it was presented on the same programme as original “folk” songs, a mixture of the old and the new. The lyrics of the song *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* were influenced by the *corridos*, and contain stock phrases which have passed into the language, notably the expression “no te rajes”. In addition, the music exploits the rhythm of rural dances such as the *jarabes* which date back to the nineteenth century.

### 6.2.3 THE SERENADE AND THE SINGING DUEL

In this film, the scene of the serenade is immediately followed by a singing duel (*huapango*) between the two rivals, Chava and Felipe for the love of the beautiful *señorita* Carmen. The song chosen for this scene is *Traigo un amor* (Esperón/Cortázar) which was already a hit for the singer Lucha Reyes. She had recorded it in 1941, for RCA accompanied by the *Mariachi Vargas de Tecatitlán*, together with two other hits by Severiano Briseño *Los Tarzanes* and *Caminito de Contreras*. The lyrics of this song have no reference to the rural world; what makes it a *ranchera* is the accompaniment of *mariachis*, the style of singing and, visually, the *charro* costume of the singers. It has a quick waltz rhythm and the tune and the rhythm remind us of the popular song *Cielito Lindo*.

In the film the *charro* publicly expresses his love for his beloved and in the middle of the song his other rival appears with his own band of musicians. According to Monsiváis, Lucha Reyes, like the *cantadoras*, took on the male gender in these songs: “las cantantes de *ranchero* adquieren la perspectiva masculina y se refieren a las amadas con toda



naturalidad, sin que se filtre la mínima sospecha de lesbianismo.”<sup>48</sup>

A esa mujer yo la quiero  
hasta la muerte  
y para mi buena suerte  
soy el dueño de su amor

Monsiváis observes that the cantadoras: “representan amores, intereses, resentimientos y ganas de los hombres, y, en tanto artistas, son intercesoras de las desdichas y los regocijos de la masculinidad.”<sup>49</sup> These songs represent the roles of masculinity and femininity in Mexican society where a man had to pay court to a woman but she was not expected to woo him. At the same time the *cantadoras* were challenging the conventions of society by sending the same message but not for a masculine audience.

The film provides an opportunity for the main character, i.e. the star, to perform a solo song to show off his voice. The treatment, however, differs from the Hollywood approach. Negrete sings and plays the guitar, but he is accompanied by the *mariachi* band and his two companions. In *Ay Jalisco* the *charro* is more assertive than in *Allá en el Rancho Grande*. He sings the serenade to his own sweetheart, not that of the *patrón*. This film began the tendency to introduce the urban world and to contrast it with the rural. For example, we see the clothes of the two rivals: Chava wears his *charro* costume; Felipe, the *señorito*, always wears a city suit. Negrete’s role, the rural inhabitant, the *charro*, is assertive and proud of his traditions, such as his *charro* costume. He has qualities which his rival lacks; he can play the guitar and sing.

The setting of this scene is similar to that in *Allá en el Rancho Grande*: a paved street and, typical of Mexican films, the iron grille in front of the girl’s window. The lyrics are in the first person and express the feelings of being in love:

Traigo una amor  
y lo traigo tan adentro  
que hay momentos  
que no siento  
donde tengo el corazón

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<sup>48</sup>Monsiváis, ‘Lola’, p. 54.

<sup>49</sup>Idem.



Traigo un querer  
tan adentro está de mi alma  
que he perdido hasta la calma  
por querer a esa mujer

The audience sees Chava singing to his beloved that he is the “owner of the love of this woman”. The audience, however, knows - as he does not yet know - that Carmen has been forcibly betrothed to Felipe. She stands behind the window bars eager to open the window and welcome her lover. But she finds herself unable to do so. The following verse has a descant harmony which is characteristic of these *ranchero* serenades which is immediately recognizable as Mexican.

A esa mujer  
yo la quiero como quieren  
como quieren esos hombres  
que son puro corazón

A esa mujer  
yo la quiero hasta la muerte  
y para mi buena suerte  
soy el dueño de su amor

The male trio, dressed in their black costumes, alternate with Negrete to continue the serenade. While the *mariachis* sing, Felipe, the rival to whom Carmen reluctantly became engaged, arrives with his band of musicians. There is a hint of the contrast between the unspoilt character of the countryside and the corruption of the city. Chava is dressed in the *charro* costume; Felipe, as previously mentioned, wears a city suit as do his companions.

Chorus: Traigo una amor  
y lo traigo tan adentro  
que hay momentos  
que no siento  
donde tengo el corazón

Traigo un querer



tan adentro está de mi alma  
que he perdido hasta la calma  
por querer a esa mujer

At the end of the song Negrete is joined by the male trio. In this scene the camera pans round from the rural companions to Felipe and his city friends.

A esa mujer  
yo la quiero como quieren  
como quieren esos hombres  
que son puro corazón

A esa mujer  
yo la quiero hasta la muerte  
y para mi buena suerte  
soy el dueño de su amor

As soon as Negrete's serenade has ended, the duel of words begins. Negrete, the challenger, is the first to sing. In the lyrics the *charro* expresses his pride in his rural upbringing and his love for his own music, the *mariachis*, and his scorn for what he calls the second rate songs (*rascuachis*) from abroad. This equates with the image of the *charro* presented in the narrative of the film as a man proud of his traditions, his music and his skills as a singer.

Ayer me bajé del risco  
y vengo de la montaña  
y como soy de Jalisco  
no me gusta la música extraña

Me gustan ya los mariachis  
con sus canciones de amor  
y no canciones *rascuachis*  
traidas del exterior

Me acompaño en mi guitarra  
y ahora la voy a ventar para ver



si él que la agarra tiene con que contestar

The lyrics run parallel with the images in the film. The *charro* can play the guitar and sing well; Felipe, the city dweller has no such skills, and his group does not even have a guitar. Chava contemptuously throws them the guitar and challenges them to answer him. The *macho* image of the *charro* is contrasted with the effete city dweller who has to be rescued by one of his companions: “Démela patrón yo le contesto”, Felipe’s arrogance is evident when he replies: “Pero muy macho viejo.”

Yo siempre tengo  
en la boca lista mi contestación  
y como ahora a mi me toca  
aprovecho la ocasión

hacer el alarde de macho  
prueba no tener valor  
a palabras de borracho  
oídos de mostrador.

The lyrics continue with the narrative of the film, telling us what is happening. Negrete first dismisses the taunting of the other and then dares him to meet him the next day in the horse race and to see if “se raja”:

echa por echar habladas  
cualquiera las puede echar  
a mi me vienen holgadas  
anda vete a romanear

y la... ese tal caballero  
que si es hombre de verdad  
en las carreras lo espero  
y no se vaya a rajarse

There are many expressions taken from popular theatre; others have been invented ostensibly to represent the language of the rural dweller, however, some of these have



their roots in the city *barrios*. As an example we have the intervention of Chaflán with verbal quips such as: “Eso te lo digo Pancho para que lo entiendas puncho.” This is an effective way to relieve the tension of the situation.

Don Felipe es caballero  
y a todo sabe cumplir  
y por la mujer que el quiere  
tan bien el sabe morir,

así es que den campo libre  
o lárguense a otro lugar  
porque en esta casa vive  
con la que se ha de casar.

The *charro* boasts of his manhood: how could this woman love a child instead of a man? This is a jibe at Felipe’s dependence on his father.

Esa mujer es mi vida  
y la adoro con pasión  
es mi novia consentida  
dueña de mi corazón

quiere a un hombre pa’quererlo  
y no a niños con papá,  
a usted mismo se lo digo  
y arránqueseme pa’ca

There is a brief bout of fisticuffs, with Chaflán wilding the guitar as a weapon and making comic jests: “Como ya le estamos, dimos dando pa’luego es tarde, sobres.” The arrival of the local authorities signals the end of the fight, and Chava explains that they are only trying to keep warm. He offers to shake hands with his rival, who declines, claiming superior status to his opponent. This is an indication of the chivalry of the *charro* and his sense of honour, contrasted with the arrogance and empty pride of the city dweller.

The conclusion of the story comes in a horse race between the rivals Chava and Felipe



(this film had a bigger budget than *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and the race is shown on screen). Suspense is maintained when just before the “off”, Malasuerte tells Chava that Felipe’s father is responsible for the murder of his parents. The audience can see the anger in Chava’s face and wait to see what he is going to do. Chava takes part in the race and wins while Felipe angrily accepts his defeat. Malasuerte, true to his word, accuses the self-styled General of being the man who paid him and the assassins to murder Chava’s parents in order to steal their ranch. Malasuerte and the General both shoot - and kill each other. Chava’s revenge is complete and order is restored. Chava now knows, what the audience already knew: that Carmen loved him but she was prepared to sacrifice herself by marrying Felipe in order to save her father’s ranch from the greed of the General who wanted to join both properties together. With the promise of a marriage, and as part of the tradition of melodrama, we see them riding off into the sunset to the accompaniment of the theme song *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!*

The film critic García Riera agrees with Ayala Blanco that this film gave an image abroad of the Mexicans as: “matones bigotudos y desaprensivos”. However, this film began to put a face to the *charro* and contributed to the development of the *comedia* and the *canción rancheras* as a distinctive genre. It contains songs ideally suited to the voice of Negrete and consolidated his identification with this type of music. The film also marked the beginning of the portrayal of a dichotomy between the city and the rural world, offering solace to the city’s rural migrants who form a major part of the audience. Rafaela Guido, a witness of this period, arrived in Mexico City in her teens. She says: “Estas películas me recordaban mi tierra (Michoacán). Allá veíamos en el pueblo, a los charros con sus charreteras, éstos son los adornos por los lados de los pantalones y eran de oro y plata, también tenían un chaleco muy adornado. Su sombrero era igual que en el cine, grande y con muchos adornos de plata, claro no todos llevaban adornos de plata.”<sup>50</sup> A sequel *El Ametralladora* was planned in 1943. Negrete now a star, wanted more money than was offered, and turned down the part. Instead, a young and eager actor, Pedro Infante, took on the role. The film was not a great success, but Infante began to be groomed by the producers Rodríguez Hermanos as Negrete’s rival.

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<sup>50</sup>Interview with Rafaela Guido. 22nd July 2002. London.



CINEMATOGRAFICA TELE-VOZ, S.A. PRESENTA EN UNA PRODUCCION CLIPSA

JORGE NEGRETE PEDRO INFANTE

# 2 Tipos de Cuidado

CON CARMELITA GONZALEZ  
YOLANDA VARELA  
CARLOS ORELLANA

DIRECCION ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ PRODUCCION DAVID NEGRETE



## CHAPTER 7. THE FILM *DOS TIPOS DE CUIDADO*: JORGE NEGRETE AND PEDRO INFANTE, THE TWO “RIVAL” CHARROS MEET ON SCREEN.

The comedy *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* (Two Guys to be Reckoned With) was a immediate box office success from its premier on the 5th November, 1953 in the México and Mariscala cinemas, only a few weeks before the death of Negrete on the 7th December.<sup>1</sup> This film finally brought the long awaited meeting of the two *charros* Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante, whom the publicity had marketed as “rivals” during the 1940s. According to Ayala Blanco this film represents the cinema of “stars” at its highest level.<sup>2</sup> The director of the film, Ismael Rodríguez, had already worked with Pedro Infante on several successful films which had made Infante a star. Among them were: *Los Tres García* (1946), *Nosotros los Pobres* (1947), *Ustedes los Ricos* (1948) and *A Toda Máquina* (1952). Rodríguez recalls how it took two years to find a story upon which both Negrete and Infante agreed: “Ya desde el argumento no podían quedar de acuerdo, los dos tenían que cantar el mismo número de canciones, ambos tenían que ser simpáticos y toser igual de fuerte. Duramos dos años para elaborar la historia por completo. Tuvieron que decidir al *fifty fifty* y por fin se logró...”<sup>3</sup> A company, Tele Voz was formed, by Negrete and the son of the outgoing President, Miguel Alemán Valdéz, and with this backing the film was produced.

The film was made during August 1952 amidst publicity surrounding both actors. Early in the year, Negrete had broken up with Gloria Marín his long term companion and embarked on a highly publicized romance with María Félix, which culminated in their wedding on 18th October. But not all the publicity was good. As the General Secretary of the Actors’ Union (Asociación Nacional de Actores, ANDA), he began a bitter campaign for re-election against his opponent the actor Mario Moreno *Cantinflas*. Various journalists who had clashed with Negrete previously over his outspoken views - even accusing him of *antimexicanismo* - took sides and used the campaign to attack him.<sup>4</sup>

While Negrete’s career had suffered because of the time he dedicated to his job in the actors’ union, Pedro Infante’s career had flourished. Unlike Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante had an image created by the more organized film, radio and record industries of the mid- and late 1940s. As the composer Manuel Esperón recalls, Infante’s first starring role, in *El Ametralladora*, the sequel to *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!* was not a success, as his style

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<sup>1</sup>A personal translation.

<sup>2</sup>Jorge Ayala Blanco, *La aventura del cine mexicano* (México: Era, 1968), p. 78.

<sup>3</sup>Enrique Serna, *Jorge El Bueno: La vida de Jorge Negrete*, 3 vols (México: Clío, 1993), III, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.



of singing did not work: “las canciones que le dieron no eran para su estilo y dio gritos”.<sup>5</sup> Later, he was groomed by the Rodríguez Hermanos and as a protégé of the director Ismael Rodríguez, his roles varied from the happy *charro* in *Los Tres García*, to a series of characters from the *barrios* of the city, such as a carpenter in *Nosotros los pobres* and a boxer from the *barrios* in *Pepe el Toro* (1952). He also appeared in roles which made him popular with the middle classes, for example a policeman from the highway patrol in the film *A Toda Máquina*. During most of his career, Infante’s recordings were controlled by an exclusive contract with the record company Peerless, and between 1943 and 1956 he recorded 310 songs for this company. After his death a further 56 songs were taken from his films and released on disc, making a total of 366.<sup>6</sup> Although one of Infante’s roles was as a *charro cantor*, he recorded very few *canciones rancheras* with rural nationalistic themes in the style of Negrete. His recordings, more suited to his voice, ranged from *corridos*, *boleros*, *serenatas*, and a series of comic *corridos* which were included in the *ranchero* repertoire. His voice was better adapted to the microphone; thus many of the recordings are *boleros* or a combination of *ranchero* and *bolero* in songs such as the hit *Amorcito Corazón* (Esperón/Pedro de Urdimalas), which he sang as a *bolero* in the film *Nosotros los Pobres* but recorded as a *bolero ranchero*; the accompaniment was with *mariachis*, introducing a new genre.

His career was also aided by the more commercially structured media. In 1951, Corona Extra, the beer company, signed Infante for a half-hour serial, aptly named *Martín Corona*. The programme went out live from the studios of the radio station XEW in the centre of Mexico City. In each programme Infante was accompanied by the Mariachi Vargas de Tecatitlán and sang two songs. The popularity of this programme was further exploited with the production of a film *Ahí Viene Martín Corona*. José Alfredo Jiménez wrote the *corrido Martín Corona* especially for the film. To make this film more appealing to foreign markets the Spanish actress Sara Montiel was his co-star. In 1952, Infante appeared frequently in the press with publicity surrounding his busy professional career. He starred in six films in addition to making guest appearances in three others; he recorded 36 songs, toured the country and appeared in variety theatres. But the press, mainly the tabloid papers such as *La Prensa* and magazines also followed his personal life. His roles in the cinema were very similar to his complicated love life. After many well known affairs, in 1951, he illegally divorced his wife, and was planning to marry a young actress Irma Dorantes, with whom he had had a child. In 1952, the press printed details of the bitter legal wrangle, between Infante and his wife who instigated proceedings to prevent a divorce, which lasted until the end of his life.

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<sup>5</sup>Interview with Manuel Esperón. 16th April 1996. Mexico City.

<sup>6</sup>José Ernesto Infante Quintanilla, *Pedro Infante: el máximo ídolo de México* (Monterrey: Castillo, 1992), p. 167.



In a carefully planned publicity campaign before the film's premier, Infante and Negrete appeared together for the first time in the first weeks of December, at the Lyric Theatre, one of the main theatres in Mexico City. In sold-out shows they played their roles as rivals by performing alternating songs. The composer Manuel Esperón recalls that as the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the 12th of December was approaching he specially wrote the song *Carta a mi Virgen* in which they alternated verses and at the end sang a duet for the first time, an event which the publicity emphasized.

For the film critic Jorge Ayala Blanco *Dos tipos de cuidado* is: "la obra maestra de la comedia ranchera".<sup>7</sup> Ayala Blanco adds that the director Ismael Rodríguez had learned his craft and was able to produce a cinematic film which revived overused elements of popular culture with a breath of fresh air. Rodríguez and his team contrived a story specially for the cinema, taking into account the two "stars": Jorge Negrete as Jorge Bueno the *macho altivo* and Pedro Infante as Pedro Malo, the *charro macho pero humilde y simpático*. *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* sets the tone of a comedy starting with the title. The *charros* are not described as *hombres* or *charros*, but the more colloquial word *tipos* (guys). Unlike the *charro* in *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!*, the character can be arrogant or humble but is not violent. The image of the *charro* is a tongue-in-cheek representation of the *macho* which "constituye su desmitificación más rotunda."<sup>8</sup> The story is set in a small town, thus the characters wear their *charro* costume only for parties and serenades where songs are part of the atmosphere.

In the following sections I will first outline the plot and then I intend to analyse the settings of the songs. The songs continue to be placed in "real" situations as they have been in the previous films. In this way, they reflect the setting of the story in a small town not a ranch; the *palenque* is omitted and the scene of the family party is introduced instead. In the setting of a space which could be identified either as a *cantina*, a *restaurante* or a *fonda*, Pedro Malo (Infante) sings the first song *La Tertulia*, a comic *corrido* by Salvador Chava Flores, 1952. His second song, *La Gloria eres tú* (José Antonio Méndez, 1952) is performed at the family party held to announce the engagement of one of the *charros*, Jorge Bueno (Negrete). This is followed by the duel of words between the two stars. Later in the film, there is a serenade consisting of a medley of songs made famous by the two singers: *Serenata Tapatía*, *Alevántate* and *Ojos Tapatíos*. The film ends with a new song *Fiesta Mexicana* specially written for the film and is performed as a duet by the two *charros* at the birthday party of Jorge Bueno. One of the main themes is a further development of the dichotomy between the urban and the rural, already touched on in *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* Other themes dealt with, and in some instances treated ironically, are male friendship, fidelity and betrayal

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<sup>7</sup>Ayala Blanco, p. 79.

<sup>8</sup>Idem



and the role of the family and marriage.

## 7.1 THE PLOT

According to Ayala Blanco, *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* belongs to a stage of development of the *comedias rancheras* around the 1950s which he calls “la comedia ranchera socarrona”. He explains that by this time the *comedia ranchera* had lost “su ingenuidad primitiva y se empiezan a incorporar notas picarescas y situaciones casi de vodevil. Los personajes se vuelven irresponsables, asociales y amorales. El número de canciones crece. La delicadeza y cierta reserva en la vulgaridad se abandonan por el insulto velado. Sin desprenderse de sus capacidades para mistificar la realidad social, la comedia ranchera se ampara en la insolencia festiva”.<sup>9</sup> The story of *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* is set in a small town, not a ranch as in previous *ranchera* films. However, the characters have contact with Mexico City, a place which represents wealth and success but also danger. The main character, Jorge Bueno (Negrete) returns to his small town after making money in Mexico City. His success is shown by his car and his expensive lounge suit. However, once in the town, he reverts to everyday rural clothes: he wears a short jacket, and a Tejano hat (smaller than in the previous films). It is only for parties and serenades that the *charro* wears his costume with silver studs and a big hat. He still wears his gun at his waist but the film does not have any violence. There is rivalry between the two *charros* but there are no shootings. The clothes of the women are also from the city, with only a slight influence from rural clothes. Their hairstyles are simple but without plaits. The language in the dialogues contain expresions already used in the cinema to represent the language of the people living in the *barrios* of Mexico City. The songs include old *ranchero* songs and new ones dealings more with an urban life.

The film still keeps some of the structure of previous *rancheros* with an introduction, the main story and the conclusion. The two singers, who were now stars, had to be persuaded that their roles were of equal status. In the Prologue, announced with big letters on the screen, the main characters are introduced: two best friends Jorge Bueno (Jorge Negrete) and Pedro Malo (Pedro Infante) flippantly propose marriage to their sweethearts, Rosario (Carmen González) and María (Yolanda Varela), Jorge’s sister, during a picnic. Borrowing a trick from the Hollywood musical, while Negrete and his sweetheart are walking along a country path he sings the Neapolitan song *O sole Mio* (di Capua), with Spanish lyrics specially written for the film. After the Prologue, the main story begins. After a long absence, Jorge Bueno returns from Mexico City to his home town as a wealthy man. He finds that his best friend, Pedro Malo, has married Rosario, formerly engaged to Jorge, and has given birth to a child that very day. Pedro celebrates

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 78.



the birth of the child by partying with other women, to the outrage of the townspeople, and has set his sights on an ex-girlfriend called María, who is Jorge's sister. Jorge feels betrayed, and plans revenge. He buys a ranch adjacent to that owned by Pedro, and decides to ruin his former friend by cutting off the water from his land. Every time they meet Jorge tries to humiliate Pedro, who begs him for water for his land. Although Jorge is still in love with Rosario, he gets engaged to Genoveva, the daughter of the General, who gives a party to announce the engagement. Pedro is invited to the party by the unsuspecting General, and sings a love song to María. Jorge is furious that Pedro has dared to come to the party and has had the effrontery to woo his sister even though he is married to Rosario. Thus, a singing duel ensues. The rivalry between the two former friends continues, and tempers become increasingly frayed. There is a meeting between the two, in which Jorge confronts Pedro. We are in the dark as to what follows, but the tension builds up, with the audience expecting "High Noon": a duel between the two *charros* drawing their guns. Instead Jorge and Pedro enter a side room, and when the two emerge they appear to be on good terms. The scene of the serenade follows, with an interesting use of the split screen device. Jorge serenades Rosario, with whom he is still in love, while Pedro serenades María. All of this causes a scandal in the town and provokes the anger of the General. The General challenges Pedro, demanding an explanation. Pedro, cornered, says the first thing that comes into his head. He tells him that Jorge was suffering from a "horrible disease" and could never marry Genoveva, otherwise the children might be handicapped. He then whispers in the General's ear and the horrified expression on his face communicates to the audience that this might be syphilis, or something similar.

The denouement takes place at the party to celebrate Jorge's birthday. After a series of misunderstandings, and much comic by-play with the doctor who is consulted about Jorge's "disease" all is revealed. Jorge's mother discloses the secret that Rosario had been raped in Mexico City during a students' party and Pedro had generously married her to give the child a name and to protect her reputation, even though he was still in love with María. After this explanation, the two old friends end up with the "right" partners. Obviously there are a few loose ends, but these are forgotten in the general celebration with which the film concludes.

Although this film is more cinematic, the influence of melodrama can still be seen. There are elements of suspense and recognition: the audience is curious to discover why Pedro has married his best friend's former sweetheart; they want to know how Jorge will react. However, from the very first mention of the surnames of the two main characters, we realize that the *charro* is being parodied. Jorge Bueno and Pedro Malo are not personifications of "Good" and "Evil": in this sense we have moved on from the melodrama of the nineteenth century serials. The main target of this satire is the



*machismo* of the *charro*. There is a certain humour in the type-casting, particularly for those who know something of the private lives of the two stars. The songs also continue to be part of the narrative and placed in settings in which singing could occur in real life.

## 7.2. THE SETTINGS OF THE SONGS

### 7.2.1 EL RESTAURANTE/LA CANTINA/LA FONDA

The song *La Tertulia* (Salvador Flores, 1952) is included in a scene when Pedro Malo celebrates the birth of his daughter in a small place which could be a small town *cantina*, *restaurante* or a *fonda*. The song helps to consolidate the image of Infante. While Jorge Negrete's image is of the "macho adinerado, buen tipo, petulante, agresivo and rencoroso", Pedro Infante is "el macho humilde, sometido, estoico y noble".<sup>10</sup> He is presented as a likable rogue with a happy-go-lucky attitude which wins him many friends even though he is poor.

*La Tertulia* is part of a series of comic songs which parodied the *rancheras*. One of the main composers of this type of songs was Salvador "Chava" Flores who wrote other songs such as *Peso sobre Peso* (1952), and there were other composers whose songs Infante made successful such as the *Cartas a Ufemia* (Fuentes/ Tomás Méndez, 1952) and *El Piojo y la Pulga* (Felipe "Charro" Gil, 1952). In a structured industry, this song was released on the radio on the 14th of November, 1952, as soon as the film was completed, although the film was not released until a year later. In December, 1952, the song was included in the repertoire of the theatre show in which both Negrete and Infante appeared to promote the film. *La Tertulia* is classified as a *corrido*. The *corridos*, with their narrative structure, were perfect material for serialization on the radio and in the cinema, for example in the series *Martín Corona*. However, the lyrics of these *corridos* reflect the changes in the image of the *charro* and the narrative of the *canciones rancheras* by the late 1940s and early 1950s. It moves from the *charro*, whose life is in the open-air rural world of the *ranchos* with galloping horses, to the private spaces of the family party, in places which could be the city's *vecindades* or *cantinas*.

In *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* the image of the *charro* has changed. Pedro is married. However, he shows his *machismo* by having constant *parrandas* (night out on the spree) even going to the *cantina* just after his wife has given birth. Mediations in this scene work on several different levels and it is almost as if the party is to welcome the

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 82.



new migrant to the city, even though it ends with an arrest. Pedro is not dressed in the *charro* costume, but in the ordinary clothes of the rural dweller in a small town, or recent immigrant to the city. He wears a short jacket and a *Tejano* hat and jeans, popular among the factory workers or mechanics in the City. The *mariachi* band who accompany him are dressed in simple rural clothes. The women in the restaurant are wearing rural clothes too. The lyrics tell the story of a family party given by a group of rural migrants to the city. The party in the song is set in a house in one of the city's *barrios* while the scene in the film is in the public space of the restaurant/*cantina* which itself has a suggestion of the rural. The guests' names identify them with the Mexican countryside and would be recognized by the audience as names common among recent rural migrants to the city.

L'otra noche fui de fiesta en casa de Julia  
se'ncontraba ya reunida la familia,  
Maripepa, Felicitas, Lucio, Tilia  
y Camila que alegraba la tertulia.

The lyrics of the song go on to relate the different incidents that happen at the party. The narrator is not a *charro* and there is no reference to life in the countryside and yet the atmosphere created with the rhythm of the trotting horse reminds us of the rural origins of the people. This is the life of the successful immigrant to the city. The enclosed space of the house is where the whole family has gathered, accompanied by friends, relatives and neighbours. The songs use references familiar to the city dweller, like the "cadetes" chasing Celia. The cadets were the students in the Army College in Mexico City who were allowed to spend their weekends at home and impressed the girls with their swords and their army uniforms:

Mientras Lupe daba al niño su mamila  
Doña Cleta pidió una botella a Celia  
Nos formó a los de confianza a dos en fila  
y brindamos con charanda de Morelia

Después Amelia puso la vitrola  
y le tupimos a la danza ya echos bola  
había un cadete que celaba a Chelo  
más la canija con Gaspar se daba vuelo



The only references to the rural world are the regional drinks, for example, the *charanda*, a strong alcoholic drink from the state of Michoacán made from the *maguey* and similar to *tequila*. In the recorded version there are some verses about the new way of life of the immigrant to the city, for example, the snacks served in the party are *sanwichitos de jalea* and the drink is Coca Cola:

Después nos dieron sanwichitos de jalea  
a unos ponche y a los tristes Coca Cola.  
pa'la cocina yo me fui con mi charola.<sup>11</sup>

The lyrics of the song include popular sayings which the audience or the listeners could recognise, for example: “la del estribo o la despedida” (“one for the road”). The language is not rural but that of the rural immigrant in the city. This song is full of words, phrases and slang from the city’s *barrios*, for example: “te doy la despedida” (when drunken people sing sentimental songs), “se armó el relajo” (all the trouble started), “La Julia”; a slang term used in the city when referring to the police. The narrative ends by telling us that a fight broke out, the police came and took them all to the police station.

Luego pidieron que cantara Lola  
y soportamos “Ay te doy la despedida”  
Después tía Cleta tocó la pianola  
pa'que no hablara le dimos buena aplaudida.

pero ya estaba digerida la jalea  
pues la mujer del general me hacía la bola  
bajo en el chisme la metiche de Carola  
y viene el viejo y que empieza la pelea

se armó el relajo, sacó su pistola  
yo precavido me escondí tras la pianola  
vino la Julia que llamó Carola

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<sup>11</sup> This verse is in the recorded version but not in the film.



y pa'la cárcel nos llevaron echos bola.

While the lyrics of the song describe a party in a house in Mexico City's *barrios* the film shows Pedro in a small town *cantina*. For the audience the lyrics are closer to their everyday life but the visual image of the *cantina* constitutes the mediation, being a form of recovery of the oral rural culture of their *pueblos*.

### 7.2.2 LA FIESTA FAMILIAR AND THE SINGING DUEL

In *Dos Tipos de Cuidado*, the *palenque* is omitted and the two rival *charros* are brought together at a family party, echoing the theme of *La Tertulia*. This takes place at a big house in a small town. This allows the songs and the singing duel to be set in a more realistic way for this period; at this time, people in the audience rarely went to fairs and *palenques*. It is also more realistic for the two main characters to wear their *charro* costumes with silver studs at a party. Influenced by the American Westerns, the conventional dress code is observed: Pedro Malo (the bad guy) wears a black suit and Jorge Bueno (the good guy) has a lighter suit. The party reflects the affluent middle classes, with their big houses and apart from the two *charros* and the musicians, most of the guests wear contemporary 1950s city's clothes. The family party is to announce the engagement of one of the *charros*, Jorge Bueno to Genoveva, the daughter of the General. After his arrival, the guests ask Pedro Malo to sing. Pedro chooses *La gloria eres tú*, a song which was never issued on disc in spite of the success of the film. Although Pedro is dressed as a *charro*, the lyrics are sentimental and the interpretation is reminiscent of the American crooners of the 1940s.

Eres mi bien la que me tiene extasiado  
por qué negar que estoy de ti enamorado  
de tu dulce alma que es toda  
sentimiento.

His voice caresses the microphone and there is an air of seductive intimacy. This complements the visual image where Infante casts sidelong glances at María, Jorge's sister, who is the object of his attention. It is the type of serenade whose lyrics remind us of *Ojos Tapatíos*.



De esos ojazos negros de un raro fulgor  
que me dominan e incitan al amor  
eres un encanto eres mi ilusión.

The lyrics use the conventional language of the sentimental song of this period with words like “gloria” and “cielo” which reflect the inaccessibility of women. The audience sees how uncomfortable María looks. A married man is serenading her, while her brother, Jorge walks slowly towards Pedro with anger in his eyes.

Yo pensé que la gloria está en el cielo  
y es de los mortales el consuelo al morir,  
bendito Dios porque al tenerte yo en vida  
no necesito ir al cielo mi vida, y alma mía  
la gloria eres tú.

After Pedro's has sung this song, the two stars are given equal prominence by means of the singing duel. The setting is the patio of the mansion where the party is taking place and Jorge and Pedro in their roles of rivals confront each other. Jorge uses the resonance of his voice to attempt to dominate his rival. But Pedro, by retaining his composure and refusing to raise his voice, gets the better of the argument. Pedro begins by making fun of Jorge by saying that with his surname he will make a good husband.

La gente dice sincera  
que haga que si se hace un casorio  
que el novio siempre la quiera  
sino que le hagan velorio

para esta novia no hay pena  
pues va a tener buen marido  
porque Bueno es cosa buena  
por lo menos de apellido

Jorge Bueno es muy bueno  
hijo de Bueno también  
y su abuelo Ay que bueno  
quien se llamara como él



Before Jorge begins, he tries to show that he is better than his rival by asking for an accompaniment in a higher key, when he says: “échele pero más arriba”. Then in a similar way to Pedro, Jorge makes fun of Pedro’s surname by saying that rather than a bad person he is “maleta”, the city slang for a “duffer”. The accompaniment is from a trio, augmented by an unseen string orchestra.

Procuraré ser tan bueno  
como dice mi apellido  
que se trague su veneno  
el que velorio ha pedido

Pedro es malo de apellido  
retachar es su quarteta  
él nomás es presumido  
porque no es malo es maleta

Pedro Malo es muy malo,  
malo por obligación  
y su abuelo huy que malo  
hay que comprarle su líon

Pedro starts with stock phrases from popular sayings and then he continues jokingly playing with the meaning of both their surnames. He accepts that he is “malo” (a bad person), but he would like to mix “bueno” and “malo” to see if the combination will produce a happy medium. The double meaning of this is that he is Pedro Malo and Jorge’s sister is María Bueno.

En una mañana de oro  
alguién nublaba el paisaje,  
eran un cuervo y un loro  
arrancandose el plumaje

hay que olvidar lo pasado  
si la culpable es la suerte



que bueno y malo  
en regular se convierte

yo soy malo no lo niego,  
pero quisiera mezclar  
malo y bueno para ver  
si sale algo que sea regular

Jorge angrily sings a series of verses playing on the meanings of “good” and “bad” making use of colloquial phrases, saying that Pedro is poisoned with his own venom, in other words eaten up with jealousy.

Un colmenar visitaba  
para ver si la ponzoña  
con la miel se le quitaba  
como no sé nada bueno  
para placer del malvado  
con la miel y su veneno  
hoy anda el pobre purgado

Que lo entienda  
si es que lo sabe entender  
y si acaso no lo entiende  
hay que obligarlo a entender

Now the rivalry between the two characters continues not as a dialogue but in alternate verses. The images in the film place them in a duel as in a Western but this takes place in the patio and without guns. In the following verses the audience undertands the double meaning of the lyrics. Pedro tells Jorge how hungry he is for friendship but goes on to say that he doesn't mind satisfying his hunger at his friend's banquet. A taunting reference to Jorge's sister. Jorge replies that Pedro a “mendigo”, a beggar, but this word when the stress is put on the first syllable becomes an insult. Then they exchange rapid single lines to build up the tension and to speed up the interchange. Jorge challeges Pedro to a fight with the slang “no le saques” (don't be chicken). But Pedro angers Jorge more by replying “si le saco” (Yes, I'm chicken). The situation is resolved when Genoveva asks Jorge to dance and the orchestra plays conventional American-style dance music of the 1950s.



Pedro	Me consta que no soy tonto como tú lo has presumido
	Tonto no si entrometido por el hambre de amistad
	El hambre siempre la calmo con el manjar del amigo
Jorge	Mendigo, si no es mendigo el que roba a sus amigos
Pedro	Tú lo dices
Jorge	Lo sostengo
Pedro	No te vayas a cansar
Jorge	No le saques
Pedro	Si le saco
Jorge	P'os se acabó este cantar.

### 7.2.3 THE SERENADE (MEDLEY)

After the family party and the singing duel, the two rivals meet again in the *cantina*. The audience in the cinema and the clients in the *cantina* expect Jorge to beat Pedro up when they both go into a private room. Surprisingly they come out as good friends. Pedro has told Jorge something that has calmed him down. This leads to the serenade. Pedro, who is married to Rosario, sings a serenade to María; and Jorge sings one to Rosario. Negrete and Infante sing for the first and last time in a duo. They included two of the songs which were Negrete's trademark: *Serenata Tapatía* (Esperón/Cortázar, 1943) and *Ojos Tapatíos* and in between, *Alevántate* -known also as *Serenata Mexicana* - an old popular song arranged by the composer Manuel M. Ponce and recorded by Infante in 1950. These songs had already been included in previous films. The song *Ojos Tapatíos* was sang by Negrete in the second version of the film *Allá en el Rancho*



*Grande* in 1948. Infante had recorded *Alevántate* in July 1950 and released it to the radio stations in August. In December of the same year, Infante appeared in the film *Las Mujeres de mi General* (dir. Ismael Rodríguez) in which he sang *Alevántate*. The composer Esperón recalls how Infante was apprehensive about singing a duet with Negrete, who had a powerful voice. However, by this time Infante had the star status to carry off the film. His voice also has the caressing tone of the crooner which needed not power but feeling to woo his listeners.

Outside the balcony the camera focuses from above on Jorge dressed in his *charro* costume with the *mariachi* band and from there moves to the balcony and hence to a similar situation with Pedro also serenading his beloved. This setting is re-inforced by the lyrics of the song in which Jorge and Pedro confess their love and ask the girls to open their windows to hear their songs. Then cleverly using the split screen technique for the first time, the camera shows not only Jorge and Pedro singing in close harmony outside their respective balconies, but also the reaction of each woman inside. The audience see both women tempted to open the window but they cannot do it: Rosario is already married and is being serenaded by Jorge, while María is being serenaded by Rosario's husband. Then in a sharp cut the camera focuses on Pedro who sings just the first few bars of *Alevántate*.

Mujer abre tu ventana,  
para que escuches mi voz,  
te está cantando el que ama,  
con el permiso de Dios..

Tu iluminaste mi vida  
por eso mujer querida  
te canto esta noche azul  
por eso vengo a robarte  
un rayito de luz.

Pedro

Alevántate

The technique of the split screen is used once again and Negrete and Infante sing a few verses of *Ojos Tapatíos* outside the different balconies of their beloved. This technique allows the audience to see what is happening inside and outside the window's grille which separates the private space of the family and the public social space. The audience



see the two women listening to their lovers comparing their eyes to stars and love is in the air. But they are inside the space of the family and their love is impossible and they cry inconsolably. Meanwhile the men are outside and they both know they can break the rules and get away with it.

Duet	apagan sus luces las blancas estrellas,
Pedro	los aires esparcen aromas mejores,
Jorge	y todas las flores suspiran de amor

Jorge/Pedro	Por una mirada de tan lindos ojos,
	estrellas y flores padecen enojos,
Pedro	los aires suspiran, el cielo se apaga.
	blum, blum, blum.

The serenade finishes on a note of humour when Jorge thinks that Rosario has melted under his serenade: instead of the face of his beloved in the window appears the bristling mustache of her father.

7.2.4 LA FIESTA DE CUMPLEAÑOS

To mark the resolution of the conflict, the film ends with a *fiesta* celebrating the birthday of Jorge Bueno. At this point the audience know the secret which the two *charros* share. Pedro had only married Rosario because she had become pregnant after her drink had been spiked at a party she had attended in Mexico City. By the time Rosario returned to her home town, Jorge had already left for the Capital, so as a magnanimous gesture, Pedro had married her. The truth is now revealed to Jorge's parents and the unsuspecting father of Rosario. The loose ends to this story are forgotten in the general celebration: the audience see the two pairs of united lovers embracing happily in a satisfying melodramatic conclusion. The mood of happiness is reflected in a theatrical show-stopper, a rousing chorus which sends the audience away feeling elated; this is a feature which previous *ranchero* films had lacked. Although the two singers are given equal status in visual terms in this scene, it is Negrete who carries the melody with Infante supplying the harmony. Nevertheless, there is no winner or loser: the two *charros* are united in a paean to Mexican life. The lyrics of this song recreate the distinctiveness of the Mexican *quermés* with a summary of the different dishes, drinks and people. The rhythm is taken from the *jarabe tapatío* but although the words mention the *charro* and a *ranchera* they do not make any reference to the ranch.



**Duet**

A olvidarse de las quejas  
la quermés ha comenzado  
vengan todos a la fiesta  
pa'legrar el corazón

¡Ay!, que lindas las muchachas  
con su ropa almidonada  
con sus grandes arracadas  
y sus trajes de charol

¡Ay!, cuantos puestos  
de nieve horchata  
con el frescor de sus aguas  
de jamaica y de limón

hay de melón y de fresa,  
del más sabroso tepache  
de colorada sandía,  
pero ya de piña, ¡Ay!

The camera pans round and in keeping with the lyrics, pauses briefly to show the smiling faces of the guests, women dressed in Mexican rural costumes. This scene emphasizes the different Mexican dishes which distinguish this country from others. The lyrics of the song and the photography link these images with nationalistic symbols such as the small Mexican flags next to the dishes which adorn the tables.

**Chorus**

Cuantos platos adornados  
con listón y banderitas

**Pedro**

Y ¡Ay! que prietas tan bonitas  
nos atienden con afán

**Chorus**

De manteca y de dulce,  
los tamales calientitos

**Jorge**

Los buñuelos doraditos  
y gorditas de comal



Duet

Allá juegan lotería  
los que le dan a dados,  
a los enamorados  
los llevarán a casar

The audience join in the fun of the party as they hear the descriptions in the lyrics and see the visual images. They all know that a party must have *mariachis* and they almost feel they are dancing to the music. However, the people on the screen are not city dwellers but *rancheros* and *charros* in full regalia. The camera pans round and we see the party guests dressed in Mexican rural clothes, and the audience. The last verse brings to mind the early *canciones rancheras* expressing the love for Mexico and its people.

Pedro

Allá tocan los mariachis un son  
lo están bailando  
un charro y una ranchera sin igual

Duet

¡Ay! que bonitas  
son las fiestas mías  
donde todo es alegría,  
dulce música y color  
  
donde muchos ojos negros  
con destellos de lucero  
van buscando placenteros  
a un ranchero salidor  
  
¡Ay! que encantos de la tierra mia  
pasión y de amor  
  
que reflejan en tu niña  
el fulgor de mis estrellas  
de mi tierra y de mi son



The two *charros* Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante preserved and revitalized the image of the *charro* and eased the masses in the *barrios* in their adaptation to a life in a fast growing and modern city “estas vivencias provincianas evocan situaciones míticas cuya estabilidad y armonía social han de contrarestar en la imaginación del oyente, la opresión visual y psicológica del medio urbano, medio que ... es advertido como un domicilio completamente utilitario”.<sup>12</sup> The *charro* was by this time more in tune with a society in transition from rural to urban. Instead of living on a ranch, the *charro* inhabits a small town and he keeps his silvery *charro costume* only for special occasions such as parties or serenades. He is neither a rural bandit nor a criminal. His *machismo* is not tested in the *palenques* or the horse-races but symbolically in family parties where in a singing duel, he will try to outdo his rival. With this parody of the *charro cantor* as a *macho* and the use of old *ranchero* songs together with new ones reflecting the urban setting, the director Ismael Rodríguez; “resucita la espontaneidad de un folklore ya muy fatigado”.<sup>13</sup> Before long, the *charro cantor* and the *rancheras* were to undergo further changes with the new style of the composer, José Alfredo Jiménez and a female singer, Lola Beltrán, would soon take the title of *La Reina de la Canción Ranchera*. *Dos Tipos de Cuidado* marks the end of the first period of the *charro cantor* and the *rancheras* with its nationalistic themes of life in the open air, what Monsiváis calls “la celebración de lo público”, constituting a mediation between the rural and urban worlds. After the 1950s the *charro cantor* and the *rancheras* turned to themes of individual suffering: “la confesión de los desastres privados”.<sup>14</sup> They had become a mediation between urban life in the confinement of the *vecindades* and the pressures and stresses of city life -but that is material for further investigation.

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<sup>12</sup>Carlos Monsiváis, “Notas sobre la cultura popular en México”, in *Latin American Perspectives* (1978), 98-118 (p. 112).

<sup>13</sup>Idem

<sup>14</sup>Idem



## CONCLUSIONS

The *charro cantor*, in the person of Tito Guizar, extended beyond the borders of Mexico with the international success of the film *Allá en el Rancho Grande* in 1936. The film was distributed in the US for the Spanish-speaking audience and later dubbed into English for the coveted American market. After this success many other films began to use the same elements: the setting of the *ranchos*, and the main character of the *charro*, with his distinctive *sombrero* and suit decorated with silver studs, who would sing in contexts where singing would occur in real life. Thus, the *charro cantor* with his recognizable image and repertoire was introduced into a type of film which began to be accepted as a distinct genre, the *comedias rancheras*. The term *charro cantor* came to be associated with Tito Guizar, Jorge Negrete and later Pedro Infante. At the same time the *canciones rancheras*, although they were not always called by this name until later, started to gain widespread popularity through the radio, public performances and records.

In this study of the development of the *charro cantor*, my interdisciplinary approach and my use of Martín Barbero's notion of mediation has enabled me to examine a series of relationships between popular culture and the media, the government and the media, and film and audience. I have sought to prove that although the *charro* attained prominence through the medium of the cinema, the figure itself is much older, with its roots in Mexican popular culture, and can be traced back at least as far as the nineteenth century, long before it was presented on the screen. I have already mentioned the bandit in the narratives of the nineteenth century serials which were influenced by the melodrama; these had absorbed characteristics from an oral tradition and made use of actual events and real people. As I have pointed out, many of these bandits were not real criminals: they were what Hobsbawm calls "social bandits", people who end up on the wrong side of the law because of social instability. In fiction at any rate, they would rob the rich to give to the poor, as in the serial *Astucia: El Jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o los Charros Contrabandistas de la Rama*. The *comedias rancheras* were also influenced by three features of melodrama which existed in these serials: time, recognition and morality. Time marks the way in which historic episodes are related to events in the family, with many of the *comedias rancheras* ending in a wedding. As we have seen, the films also took over the idea of recognition on two levels: on one level the audience recognize and identify with some of the characters; on another level, they know about events of which the other characters in the film are ignorant, and this maintains suspense. Finally, there is the question of morality, and in the world of the *comedias rancheras*, as in the melodrama, 'good' and 'evil' are relative, and must be seen in the context of their time and place.



My method has enabled me to establish a connection between the *charro cantor* and the popular theatre (*teatro de género menor*). In the days of the revival of the *zarzuela* and the *revista* (late nineteenth - early twentieth century), the *charro* began to appear as a recognizable character in what had become his traditional costume, and would often be required to sing Mexican popular songs of the day on the stage. At about the same time, other groups such as the *Orquesta Típica* began to adopt the *charro* costume, by now identified as “authentic” Mexican. Later, in the 1920s the *mariachi* bands abandoned their white cotton garments for the more theatrical *charro* costume when they came to work in the popular theatres of Mexico City. Even when they broadcast on the radio, the studio audience would expect to see them in *charro* costume.

In my investigation of the relationship between the Mexican government and the media and the changes in this relationship which occurred during the period in question, my intention has been to illustrate how the image of the *charro* was appropriated by various post-revolutionary governments and used as a form of mediation with which to resolve the cultural tensions in the new mass society. The *charro cantor* had a role to play in this mass society where the people of the countryside felt the threat of losing their way of life. At the same time the people of the city, many of them recent rural immigrants, experienced a need to cope with new social pressures: the massification of city life and the loss of their own individuality in becoming part of the masses. The image of the *charro* represented an invitation to become Mexicans and to feel part of a community. Furthermore, the state needed to unify the nation. The use of “el pueblo” as the centre of Mexican culture made the people feel they were active participants in the formation of the post-revolutionary modern nation-state. The government found in popular culture and the media one of the symbols it could use to represent “lo mexicano”. The image of the *charro* produced by the media acted as a mediation between rural Mexico and the modern urban state, between “lo popular” and “lo masivo”.

The people who watched these films when they first appeared were familiar with tales of bandits such as the nineteenth century *Los Plateados* and the revolutionaries known as *Los Dorados de Villa* made memorable in the *corridos*. The bandits featured in the *corridos* were well known, as were the bullfighters and other local heroes. All this was part of the background of the *comedias rancheras* and part of the general culture of the audience. In his imposing costume, the *charro* on screen with his self-mocking *machismo* and devil-may-care attitude to life had an immediate impact; coupled with a heroic or caressing singing voice and the good looks of the star, the *charro* had an appeal to viewers of both sexes. Less remote than some of the Hollywood idols, the *charro* was a figure with whom the audience could identify as he represented their aspirations in the real world. It is this identification above all that accounts for the



popularity of Negrete, Infante and Guizar.

It was the cinema which put a face to the *charro*, and the “talkies” which gave him a voice. This combination of visual image and sound was the perfect medium for the *charro cantor*. In contrast with Hollywood musicals in which characters would often burst into song “at the drop of a hat”, in Mexican films songs were used in specific situations corresponding to their occurrence in real life. This allowed the audience to identify with scenes with which they were already familiar.

The choice of songs was as important as the image of the *charro*. The repertoire of the *charro cantor* included not only songs specially written for the cinema but traditional themes and melodies, sentimental or heroic. This created an illusion of “authenticity” re-inforced by the settings in which the songs are performed, representing aspects of life in the countryside such as the *palenque*, the *cantina* or *pulquería*, the *serenade* and the family party. The effect of this was to make the cinema audience imagine a sense of community with the characters on the screen. In a sense, the audience were spectators at the *palenque*, customers in the *cantina* and guests at the family party. It is interesting to note that the *charro cantor* is accompanied more often than not by *mariachis*. This also aids the sense of identification for the cinema audience. To date, this is the first study to the *charro* repertoire and its relationship with films, thus analysing the songs in their cinematic context.

It is important to understand the historical and social background to these films. The process of industrialization attracted people from the countryside to the cities, many of whom were illiterate (50% in 1940) and who experienced a profound culture shock; thus “los medios electrónicos, en su primer auge, son los mediadores entre el shock de la industrialización y la experiencia campesina y popular urbana, de ningún modo preparada para los cambios gigantescos que, desde la década de los 40, modifican la idea del país o de lo nacional”.<sup>1</sup> The *charro cantor* and the *rancheras* on the radio and in the cinema acted as a mediation between the rural and urban worlds; they mediated in the transition of newcomers to the city in that they offered nostalgia, solace, and softened the blow.

With the application of an interdisciplinary approach it is hoped that this research has placed the *charro cantor* in context. Without this approach these interactions would not have come to light. This work has gone beyond the study of the songs and has allowed me to make a specific analysis of the *charro cantor* and the co-existence of popular and mass culture. This is I hope a significant contribution to the fields of popular and mass culture.

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<sup>1</sup>Carlos Monsiváis and Carlos Bonfil, *A través del espejo: El cine mexicano y su público* (México: El Milagro, 1994), p. 96.



The method I have used can be extended to other areas of Mexican culture which were beyond the scope of this thesis but need further research. One such area is the examination of the role of women in the media focusing on *ranchero* singers such as Lucha Reyes and Matilde Sánchez, “La Torcacita”, who took the style of singing of the *cantadoras* in the *palenques* into the popular theatre and the media. The careers of these singers in the light of the contradictions of Mexican society deserve further investigation. Since no recordings exist of the live performances of the *cantadoras* this is a very challenging task. Another area for examination is the period after 1950 when, after the death of the main male singers Negrete and Infante, a more highly organized media industry produced a song genre in its own right which did not need the films to survive. In this period many female singers, such as Lola Beltrán, Dora María, Lucha Villa, Amalia Mendoza and “La Prieta Linda” appeared alongside male singers such as José Alfredo Jiménez, Javier Solís and Vicente Fernández. In this more highly organized period, various composers such as José Alfredo Jiménez, Tomás Méndez and Rubén Fuentes changed the style and content of the genre from: “la celebración de lo público a la confesión de los desastres privados”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Monsiváis, ‘Lola Beltrán: Que le toquen *Las Golondrinas*’, *Proceso*, I April 1996, pp. 52-54 (p. 54).



## APPENDIX

### BIOGRAPHIES OF JORGE NEGRETE AND PEDRO INFANTE.

Carlos Monsiváis describes the nostalgia for the 1940s with a tinge of irony: “sus *stars* con guante de antílope, sus ambientes elegantes y refinados, sus cigarros que satisfacen desde la primera fumada, sus premiers de temporada de ópera, sus cabarets tiernamente desvelados, sus soirees y aromas daphne y carnation y gardenia y rose-geranium”.<sup>1</sup> In this decade with the expansion of the mass media, especially the cinema, the names of the *ranchero* singers Jorge Negrete (1911-1953) and Pedro Infante (1917-1947) joined the nascent Mexican radio and film star system with other stars such as María Félix, Dolores del Río, Arturo de Córdoba, Pedro Vargas, Juan Arvizu. The tragic and premature deaths of Negrete and Infante established them both as legendary figures.

#### JORGE NEGRETE *EL CHARRO CANTOR*

On the 7th of December, 1953, three days after his death in the Cedars of Lebanon hospital in Hollywood, an American Airlines plane, hired by the Mexican government, landed in Mexico City carrying the body of Jorge Negrete. At a time when the population of Mexico City was 3 million, more than 500 thousand people lined the streets of the route from the airport to the theatre of the National Association of Actors where he was to lie in state. As an act of homage the government closed all the cinemas and theatres. The hearse, attracting a greater crowd than on the previous days, departed for the cemetery, with Pedro Infante at the head of the procession.<sup>2</sup> This included Negrete's widow the film star María Félix and such stars of the Mexican cinema as the comedian Mario Moreno *Cantinflas*, with whom Negrete had had some clashes in the formation of the union for actors; there were also government figures like the ex-president Miguel Alemán Velasco. Negrete was 42 years old.

Jorge Alberto Negrete Moreno, the second of five children, was born on the 18th of November, 1911, in the state of Guanajuato. In his passport, however, he managed to enter the city of Chihuahua as his place of birth, perhaps in an attempt to re-invent himself as a man from a region famous for strong men. His parents were David Negrete, a lieutenant colonel, and Emilia Moreno, the daughter of a lawyer. Jorge Negrete spent his childhood in León, the capital of the state of Guanajuato, where he attended school at

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<sup>1</sup>Carlos Monsiváis, *Escenas de pudor y liviandad* (México: Grijalbo, 1988), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>Jorge Serna, *Jorge El Bueno: la vida de Jorge Negrete* (México: Clío, 1993), III, pp. 50-3.



El colegio de Santa María. His father left the army and amid the insecurities of the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution took the family to Mexico City, where he obtained a post as teacher of mathematics and language at the German School. Because his father was working in the school, Negrete was able to study free of charge at this expensive school which his family would not otherwise have been able to afford.

In 1924, after finishing his elementary education, Negrete, now aged 13, went on to study for what at the time was the four year Joint Certificate of Secondary Education and *bachillerato*. This was at the Colegio de San Ildefonso, (Preparatoria number 1, under Vasconcelos' newly re-organized educational system). However, the young Negrete often preferred the billiards saloon to the classroom. When he failed his first year examination, his father offered him the alternative of studying with the Maristas Brothers or going to the newly founded Agricultural College (The University of Chapingo). Neither option appealed to Negrete so he asked his father to find some way of getting him into the army, the normal entrance age of which was 15.<sup>3</sup> This was achieved and from 1925 to 1929, he studied in the School of Administration of the Army College, and graduated as a Lieutenant (Teniente de Intendencia). In 1930, while he was serving as an Army Officer he began to take singing lessons from José Pierson. Negrete sang in various army festivals and in 1933 he decided to resign from the Ministry of Defense and to try to make a career as a solo singer. He was one of many Mexican singers who had had an operatic training but who found employment in the popular theatre and later on radio and in the cinema; this was the period of transition between pre-electric recording and the development of the mass media which began with the introduction of the microphone (in about 1926) and the subsequent advent of the talkies.

Negrete had trained in the studio of José Pierson. Pierson, a notable singer himself, made a valuable contribution to Mexican cultural life. Without government assistance, he had formed a Mexican opera company training and employing solely Mexican singers from the various state and private music colleges during World War I. This was a courageous venture as theatrical impresarios had tended to favour singers from Europe who had more appeal for the public, and were unwilling to hire local talent. However, the circumstances were favourable for the creation of a Mexican opera company: during this period foreign artists were reluctant to travel to Mexico because of the dangers of war and the instability of the post-revolutionary situation in the country. After the War, Pierson failed to receive government support but he continued to teach private students in his studio and many of them became stars of the radio and cinema, among them Jorge Negrete, together with Pedro Vargas *El Barítono de América*, one of the main male interpreters of Agustín Lara's music, and Jorge Arvizu *El Tenor de la Voz de Seda*, who also achieved fame in the cinema and on the radio.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., I, pp. 22-3.



In the years to come, Negrete began a long struggle to try to establish himself, singing operatic arias and Neapolitan songs on the radio and popular theatre, but the public did not respond and his contracts were not renewed. He also appeared in various films which were flops. In November 1936, he and another aspiring singer called Roberto Armengod, were granted a release from their contract with the radio station XEW and travelled to New York in search of fame. Their fares were paid by the radio station and the rest of the money needed was obtained from the advertising revenue from a benefit concert broadcast on the radio, in which already established singers such as Pedro Vargas, Las Hermanas Aguila and Emilio Tuero gave their services for nothing. Both Negrete and Armengod obtained work in New York with the American network NBC, singing in Spanish duets, arias, ballads and operetta in the intervals between programmes. While in New York, Negrete received an offer from the Mexican producer Gonzalo Varela to star in the film *La madrina del diablo*. It was in this film that he met the young actress María Félix, later to become an icon of the Mexican cinema and Negrete's future wife. The film did not receive good reviews but was a reasonable box-office success. While making this film he also performed in the revista *México Fumanchú* in the evenings

He then returned to New York and auditioned for the Metropolitan Opera. The only job he was offered was as an understudy. This he refused, after which the doors of the opera world were closed to him. According to his daughter it was in New York that he contracted the hepatitis which was to lead to his death some years later: in a foreign country and with no money and few friends, he stayed in the room of his hotel. After an apparent recovery the break up of the partnership with Armengod, Negrete met the Cuban composer Eliseo Grenet who became his friend and introduced him to the record company RCA. He also found some work on the radio and in night-clubs and managed to augment his income by translating English songs into Spanish for Jack Robins who represented Southern Music, the publishing house.<sup>4</sup>

During this year, he became the star of another Mexican film *La Valentina*, the title taken from the famous revolutionary *corrido*, which was not a box office success. However, he did meet Elisa Christy, the daughter of the Spanish actor Julio Villarreal, who was later to become his first wife. He spent most of 1938 in Mexico starring in various films, none of them particularly successful. Among these were *Perjura*, based on the romantic song of the same name by the composer Miguel Lerdo de Tejada. One of the scriptwriters was the author and critic Salvador Novo and the sets were designed by the painter Roberto Montenegro. This film was reasonably successful at the box office, unlike the films which followed. For example, in *El Fanfarrón* he played the role of a hated *hacendado* who kidnaps a beautiful girl and chases a kind-hearted bandit. This

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<sup>4</sup>Diana Negrete, *Jorge Negrete: biografía autorizada* (México: Diana, 1989), p.103.



film was a complete flop and was not even released until much later when Negrete had already achieved a degree of fame. Nevertheless, he did make some good contacts, for example the comedian *El Chicote* and in this film he sang songs by the composer Manuel Esperón for the first time.<sup>5</sup> In 1939, Gustav Mohme, the manager of 20th Century Fox in Mexico put him under contract for one year, to perform in the Spanish films made in Hollywood. However, the only part he was offered was in a short musical in colour called *Noches de Cuba*, starring with his old friend Roberto Armengod. When the contract had expired, at the beginning of 1940, Negrete returned to New York in search of work and joined his friend Eliseo Grenet to sing in the nightclub La Conga.

The year 1940 found Negrete struggling to get contracts: he went to Havana, then back to Miami, where he married Elisa Christy whom he had met on the set of *La Valentina*. During the next few months he travelled to various parts of the United States, accepting work as a singer wherever he could to support his wife, who was no longer working. Fortunately, in 1941, his brother David Negrete sent him a telegram saying that he had managed to obtain the main role in the film *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* for him. He accepted the part somewhat reluctantly, as he still cherished hopes of becoming an operatic tenor. The composer Manuel Esperón recalled in an interview that when Negrete looked at the theme song he said, that it was not suitable for his type of singing; it was a song for *mariachis* and not the type of music he wanted to be associated with. When he read the lyrics by Ernesto Cortázar, he tore up the paper. Esperón added that the director Joselito Rodríguez reminded him that he had signed a contract and therefore he could not refuse to sing this song.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it was this film which made him a star in Mexico and throughout Latin America, and which won him the award for best actor of the year from the Mexican Press Film Critics (Agrupación de Críticos de Prensa). Ironically, this song would be part of his repertoire for the rest of his career. From then on Negrete was known as the *charro cantor*, a role he would play in films and real life. With fame also came his divorce. His co-star Gloria Marín was later to become his companion for many years.

It was also in 1941 that Negrete acted in the American film *Fiesta* which could not be shown in Mexico until 1950 because it did not have subtitles in Spanish. Once established as a star many contracts came his way. In 1942, he starred in various films, such as *El Peñón de las Animas* in which his co-star was again the young María Félix. During the rest of this decade, Negrete played various roles in the cinema, but was established in the public's mind as the *charro cantor*. His films include: *Cuando quiere un mexicano*, 1944; *Hasta que perdió Jalisco* and *No basta ser charro*, 1945; *El ahijado de la muerte*, 1946; a second version of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, *Jalisco canta en*

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<sup>5</sup>Serna, I, p. 40

<sup>6</sup>Interview with Manuel Esperón. 16th April 1996. Mexico City.



*Sevilla*, *Si Adelita se fuera con otro*, 1948; *Teatro Apolo* a film in which he sang with the Spanish opera singer María de los Angeles Morales, 1950; *Dos tipos de Cuidado* in which he and his “rival” Pedro Infante both starred, 1952. He made approximately 44 films, singing in most of them and he also undertook various concert tours in Latin America, Spain, Cuba and the United States.

Apart from his acting and singing career, Negrete played an important part in the organization of the structure of the Mexican film industry and in the formation of the Actors’ Union during the 1940’s. At a time when the film industry was developing, actors and extras did not have any social security. Rafaela Guido a witness of this period explains: “Vivía y trabajaba cerca de los estudios Azteca y una amiga y yo con las locuras de la juventud trabajamos como extras, como no eramos permanentes nos llamaban voluntarias. Trabajé en varias películas por ejemplo *La Barraca*, *¡Viva Pancho Villa!* and *Viva México*. No trabajé en las películas de Negrete pero lo veíamos en los estudios. Era muy amable y muy guapo. Todos queríamos trabajar con él porque pagaba mejor que los demás, y era el único que incluía la comida”.<sup>7</sup> His involvement in these activities caused his career to suffer. Negrete was responsible for drafting the basis for the the Ley Cinematográfica which he presented to the government of Miguel Alemán Velasco in 1951; it was approved and is still in force. During this year, Negrete in partnership with the president Alemán Velasco, José Luis Celís Borunda and Francisco Castellanos V. formed the film production company TELEVOZ, which made the film *Dos Tipos de Cuidado*. In 1953, he helped to create a national association for actors, Asociación Nacional de Actores (ANDA).

His second marriage on the 18th of October, 1952, to his former co-star María Félix was the social event of the year. They married at her country house Catipoato in the area of Tlalpan now part of Mexico City. Negrete wore his *charro* costume and the bride a traditional Mexican pink linen dress. More than 500 guests were invited, among them: “rostros de personajes de la industria, la banca, el arte escénico, el mundo social y cientos de periodistas que no alcanzaban a dar informe completo de la lista interminable de invitados.”<sup>8</sup> Shortly after his wedding, overwork and the stresses of his position in the union began to take its toll. Negrete did not heed the warning signs: he neglected his health and continued to make films and public appearances. The hepatitis he had contracted in New York began to recur. There appears to be no truth in the rumour that his problems were the result of excessive drinking, -as might have been suggested by his *tequila* -loving characters on screen. The composer Esperón recalled how he persuaded Ernesto Cortázar, the lyricist of many of the *ranchero* songs - who did not see eye to eye with Negrete and had quarrelled with him - to go to visit the singer in hospital. On

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<sup>7</sup>Interview with Rafaela Guido. 18th April 1996. Mexico City.

<sup>8</sup>Negrete, p. 332.



entering Negrete's hospital room they saw him on the floor playing with a toy train given to him by Pedro Infante. He was very pale and obviously dying but finally he and Cortázar were reconciled. Ironically, Cortázar was to die in a car accident three days before Negrete.<sup>9</sup>

Despite his doctor's warning, Negrete insisted on travelling to California to fulfil his obligation to appear at the Million Dollar Theatre in Los Angeles. He was in need of money, not only to provide for his family but in order to support his extravagant life style with María Félix. Before leaving Mexico his doctor had given him an injection to counteract an internal haemorrhage. In Los Angeles he was invited to attend a boxing match featuring *El Ratón Macías*, the Mexican champion, on the 22nd of November, 1953: during the fight he was taken ill. Accompanied by Frank Fouce the American impresario, Negrete returned to the hotel and a doctor was called. He was then rushed to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital by ambulance. He was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver, in this case caused by the earlier hepatitis infection rather than alcoholism. His own doctor was called from Mexico who arrived with Negrete's brother David. María Félix who was filming in France was contacted and rushed to his side. By this time Negrete could barely speak and he soon lapsed into a coma. He died at 11:45 on the 5th of December. The funeral took place in Mexico City on the 8th of December, 1953. His coffin was placed in the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Palace of Fine Arts) and cadets of the army formed a Guard of Honour to accompany it to the Jardín cemetery. His *sombrero de charro* was placed on the coffin, and as he was buried, the *ranchero* singers Miguel Aceves Mejía and Roberto G. Rivera sang *¡Ay Jalisco no te Rajes!* and then the Mariachi Vargas sang poignantly what was to become a second Mexican National Anthem:

México lindo y querido  
si muero lejos de ti  
que digan que estoy dormido  
y que me traigan aquí

que digan que estoy dormido  
y que me traigan aquí  
México lindo y querido  
si muero lejos de ti.

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<sup>9</sup>Interview with Esperón.



## PEDRO INFANTE *EL HIJO DEL PUEBLO*

Infante's role as an "indito enamorado" in the film *Tizoc* with María Félix in 1956 won him the award of best actor in the Berlin Film Festival of 1958. The award was collected on his behalf by the film director Ismael Rodríguez and producer Antonio Matouk. Pedro Infante had died on the 15th of April 1957 in a plane crash. He was the co-pilot in an aeroplane from his own company travelling from Mérida to Mexico City. He was 39 years old. His death at the peak of his fame helped to consolidate his myth. His body was taken to Mexico City and his funeral was watched by millions on television which was now accessible to many people.

Pedro Infante, the *Héroe de Guamúchil* as his publicity called him, was born on the 18th of November 1917, in the town of Guamúchil in the state of Sinaloa. His father was Delfino Infante García, a provincial music teacher, and his mother María del Refugio Cruz Aranda. The third of fifteen children, Infante attended the local primary school from the age of eight until he was twelve years old. After leaving school, he worked in various jobs: he became a messenger, hairdresser and a carpenter, a role he played years later in the cinema. He also worked with his father in the local orchestras playing various instruments and singing. In 1937, he made his debut as a singer on the regional radio station XEBL, La Voz de Sinaloa. Two years later, lured by the growing entertainment industry in Mexico City, he left his native Sinaloa. Shortly after arriving in the capital, he married María Luisa León, a girl from his home town. In 1940, Infante tried unsuccessfully to get a job with the important radio station XEW. Instead, he finally signed a contract to sing three times a week on the rival but less prestigious station XEB. During the same year, Infante entered a competition for young talents "concurso de aficionados" a 'New Faces' type of show in the Colonial theatre, and won the first prize, a *charro* costume. He also obtained minor roles in films such as *La Feria de las Flores* (1942, dir. José Benavides), in which Lucha Reyes also appeared in the last phase of her career, neither had star billing.

The composer Manuel Esperón recalled how a producer invited him to go to the nightclub at the Hotel Reforma to listen to one of the singers there: this was Infante. Esperón adds that he thought that Infante's style of singing needed to be corrected: his voice had too much vibrato but had a nice timbre. In the early days of his career, Infante sang mainly sentimental *boleros*. In 1943, he signed a contract with the record company Peerless, with which he continued to record throughout his career. The same year, he obtained the starring role in the film *El ametralladora*, the sequel to *¡Ay Jalisco no te rajes!*, which Negrete had turned down because they did not want to increase his salary. Although it was not a success, this was the beginning of Infante's career in the film industry. Esperón adds that in this film "Infante dio gritos, no funcionó por ahí. En *Los*



*Tres García*, le dije vas a cantar lo que yo te elija. Aquí tenía que cantar la canción *Mi cariñito*. Era difícil porque él quería cantar como Negrete, pero los dos tenían voces diferentes. Negrete tenía la proyección de voz del cantante de ópera, podía cantar desde la planta baja y su voz se escuchaba hasta el segundo piso mientras Infante no podía hacer esto”.<sup>10</sup>

By 1945 with a combination of films, radio programmes, records and personal appearances Infante had become extremely popular in Mexico and among the Spanish speaking communities in the states of Arizona and California. In that year he made the *ranchero* film *Cuando lloran los valientes*, beginning a long artistic partnership with the film director Ismael Rodríguez and the actress Blanca Estela Pavón. Infante became associated with the role of *charro*, although his films were not exclusively *ranchero*. In 1946, he starred in another *ranchero* film *Los Tres García*, and its sequel *Vuelven los García*, in both of which he sang the *ranchera* song *Mi Cariñito*. Both films were successful at the box office. His career continued to flourish, assisted by his personal appearances: in 1947, Infante gave concerts in the provinces of Mexico and the United States. He appeared in the Theatre Follies where he began an affair with the dancer Lupita Torrentera, with whom he had three children. Unlike Negrete, who confined himself to the rather more aloof *charro* persona, Infante was very much a man of the people, “hijo del pueblo”. The same year he starred in *Nosotros los pobres* which made him more popular than ever for his role as *Pepe, El Toro*, the carpenter from the poor *barrios* of the city, who although he has no money, possesses qualities such as valour and a sense of justice and who is moreover a good fighter, a romantic lover and a true friend. In this film, Infante sang the *bolero* *Amorcito Corazón* (M. Esperón/Pedro de Urdimalas) with orchestral accompaniment; however, in 1949 he recorded it again with a *mariachi* backing, making it the first *bolero ranchero* and a tremendous hit. This song marked the beginning of the new genre. In 1948, his popularity grew and he appeared in various films, among them the melodrama *Angelitos negros* with the theme song, of the same name, a *bolero*. He also starred in *Ustedes los Ricos*, the sequel to *Nosotros los Pobres*.

Infante was piloting his own plane when he was involved in a crash in 1949. He needed extensive surgery but recovered from his injuries, and filmed *La Oveja Negra* and *No desearás la mujer de tu hijo*, and continued with his concert tours in the USA. His career continued to soar and in 1950, he recorded 56 songs, among them *Serenata Tapatía*, *Alevántate* and *Ella*.<sup>11</sup> In the same year, he starred in the *comedia ranchera* *El Gavilán Pollero*, in which he sang *Ella* written by the *ranchero* composer and singer José

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<sup>10</sup>Idem

<sup>11</sup>José Ernesto Infante Quintanilla, *Pedro Infante: el máximo ídolo de México* (Nuevo León: Castillo, 1992), p. 56.



Alfredo Jiménez. By this time, the radio and the film industries were better organized to exploit new songs and films included songs already released on the radio and vice-versa. The song *Ella* is an example. It was recorded on the 17th August, 1950 and broadcast on the radio on the 25th October. Between the recording and the broadcast, the film began production on the 23rd October: it was released on the 26th January 1951. In these films, Infante played not only the provincial *charro cantor* but also the *muchacho de barrio*. A new venture was the radio serial *Martín Corona* (sponsored by the manufacturers of Corona, the Mexican beer) taking in which he played the title role, and which became so popular that it made the transfer to the screen as *Ahí viene Martín Corona* (1951, dir. Miguel Zacarías). This is an early instance of the media using a radio soap opera and its star to tie in with a film and to launch a song.

*Dos Tipos de Cuidado*, his *comedia ranchera* with Jorge Negrete, was made in 1952. The publicity had presented this as the long anticipated meeting between the two “rival” *charros*. Produced by the company TELEVOZ in which Negrete was an investor this film was reasonably profitable.<sup>12</sup> After Negrete’s death in 1953, Infante was acknowledged as the king of the *canción ranchera*, however, he also sang other types of songs such as the *bolero ranchero* and the *boleros*. In 1953, he and Antonio Matouk formed the company Matouk Films, and Infante became a producer. A devout Catholic, he performed on the television programme *Jornada Guadalupana* in October 1955 which was made in order to raise money for the building of an annex to the Basílica de Guadalupe. However, there were some contradictions in his life. In 1951 he took advantage of anomalies in the laws of different Mexican States to divorce his wife and on the 10th of March 1953 he married the actress Irma Dorantes (Irma Aguirre Martínez) in the city of Mérida in the state of Yucatán. His first wife fought the case and a bitter legal battle continued right up to his death and led to an acrimonious scene at his funeral.<sup>13</sup>

Pedro Infante’s plane, belonging to his own private company, crashed on the 15th April, 1957 at around 8:00 am shortly after taking off from an airfield near Mérida. Infante, who was the co-pilot, and the entire crew were killed along with some local residents on the ground. At 11:15 am the radio station XEW announced his death. The next day a plane carried his body to Mexico City. His coffin was placed in what is now called the Teatro Jorge Negrete. Thousands of people paid their respects. On Wednesday 17th, a cortege of 40 motorcyclists from the Mexican Traffic Police, significant in that he had once played such a role in a film, escorted the coffin followed by around 2,500 vehicles and buses carrying flowers. Crowds of people lined the streets. His death was now

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>13</sup>Gustavo García, *No me parezco a nadie: la vida de Pedro Infante*, 3 vols (México: Clío, 1994), III, p. 38.



covered by the radio and the new media, television. Radio stations placed loudspeakers in various streets of Mexico City where people gathered and wept. While he was buried a band of *mariachis* played a selection of his songs. He was buried in the *Jardín Cemetery* metres away from the graves of Jorge Negrete and his co-star Blanca Estela Pavón, who had also died in a plane crash.

Since Infante's death, the anniversary has been commemorated by his family led by his brother Angel, also a *ranchero* singer, and accompanied by representatives of the entertainment profession. The attention of the media has declined with the passage of time but newspapers such as the tabloid *La Prensa* give prominence to the event. A surprisingly large number of people still continue to celebrate his life on this occasion, including both young and old but drawn principally from the *barrios* of the city. They invade this exclusive suburb to listen to Infante's music from both recordings and live performances and to buy souvenir calendars with pictures of the star and CDs and cassettes sold by the *ambulantes*. A mountain of flowers covers the grave which is surmounted by a golden bust of Infante paid for by his faithful public. I attended the celebration some forty years after his death and was deeply impressed by the sentiments of the people. A frail old woman dressed in simple clothes claimed to be the founder of Pedro Infante's fan club. She was posing for the photographers, relating anecdotes and showing press cuttings and photographs of herself and the singer. I asked one young girl, aged about 16 why she had come and she found it difficult to express her feelings, but said "no sé, es algo que hacemos pues, para recordar y compartir."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Annual Commemoration of the Death of Pedro Infante. 15th April 1996, Mexico City.



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Guido, Rafaela. 5th April and 18th April 1996. Mexico City; and 22nd July 2002. London

Infante Quintanilla, José Ernesto. 17th April 1996. Mexico City

López, Marga. Homage. 26th March 1996. Cineteca Nacional. Mexico City

Monsiváis, Carlos. 30th March 1996. Mexico City

Negrete, Mrs T., sister in law of Jorge Negrete and other members of the Negrete family. 8th - 19th April 1996. Mexico City



## **II. RECORDINGS OF RECORDS, CASSETTES AND CD'S**

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**Gene Autry. PLS CD 356**

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**Jorge Negrete: En Vivo con el Trío Calaveras en La Habana Cuba. IM-0171**

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**Pedro Infante: Interpreta José Alfredo Jiménez. Peerless MCP 043**

**Pedro Infante: Las Mañanitas. Peeless MCP 1750-1**

**Pedro Infante: El más laureado trovador de América. Peerless MCP 1079-3**

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**Roy Rogers.. 'Along the Navajo Trail', Peter Dempsey. NAXOS 8.120542**

**Roy Rogers. Ride Ranger Ride. ABMMCD 1276**



### III. LIST OF FILMS

*Allá en el Rancho Grande*. Dir. Fernando de Fuentes. Script by Guz Aguila and Luz Guzmán Aguilera. Photography: Gabriel Figueroa. Music: Manuel Esperón and Lorenzo Barcelata. Main actors: Tito Guizar, Esther Fernández, René Cardona, Carlos López *Chaflán*, Margarita Cortés, Ema Roldán, Lorenzo Barcelata and Manolo Noriega. Bustamante y de Fuentes. 1936

*Allá en el Rancho Grande*. Dir. Fernando de Fuentes. Script by Guz Aguila and Luz Guzmán Aguilera. Photography: Jack Draper. Music: Manuel Esperón and Lorenzo Barcelata. Main Actors: Jorge Negrete, Lilia del Valle, Eduardo Noriega, Armando Soto la Marina *El Chicote*, Lupe Inclán, Alicia Caro. Mariachi Vargas de Tecatitlán. Jesús Grovas and Fernando de Fuentes. 1948

*¡Ay Jalisco, no te rajes!* Dir. Joselito Rodríguez. Script by Ismael Rodríguez based on the novel with the same name by Aurelio Robles Castillo. Photography: Alex Phillips. Music: Manuel Esperón. Main Actors: Jorge Negrete, Gloria Marín, Carlos López *Chaflán*, Victor M. Mendoza, Angel Garasa, Antonio Bravo, Evita Muñoz and Lucha Reyes. Rodríguez Hnos. 1941

*Dos Tipos de Cuidado*. Dir Ismael Rodríguez. Script by Ismael Rodríguez and Carlos Orellana. Photography: Gabriel Figueroa. Music: Manuel Esperón. Main actors: Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, Yolanda Varela, Carmen González, José Elías Moreno, Carlos Orellana, Mimí Derba and Queta Lavat. Tele Voz. 1952



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